

CHRISTOPHER DAWSON IN CONTEXT:

*A Study in British Intellectual History
Between the World Wars*

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Ph.D. Thesis (Modern Intellectual History)
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Declarations

I, Joseph T. Stuart, hereby certify that this thesis was researched and written by myself while a doctoral student at the University of Edinburgh (2006-2009). This thesis, in entirety or in part, has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Date: 21 August 2009

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Abstract

Christopher Dawson (1889-1970) was a British historian of culture and a pioneer during the 1920s in linking history with the social sciences. Much existent writing on him today simply tries to summarize his views on the historical process or on specific time-periods. There is a fundamental lack of real historical perspective on Dawson, linking him to his own intellectual environment. This thesis attempts to remedy that lack. It demonstrates that the most important years in which to understand Dawson's development were roughly those of the interwar period (1918-1939). During those years he wrote scholarly books as well as social and political commentaries. This thesis uses Dawson's life and writings as a window into his world—hence it is a “study in British intellectual history between the world wars.” A number of contexts will be examined through relevant archival and published source material: textual, social, cultural, and biographical, all in order to account for the numerous ideas and events that raised questions in Dawson's mind to which he then responded in his writings. Chapter one studies Dawson's reputation from the interwar years up until today in order to highlight his broad visibility, the diverse images through which his work was viewed, and the central themes he engaged with and which are the subjects of the following chapters. Those themes are: (1) Dawson's entry into British sociology during the 1920s; (2) his response to the question of human progress in Britain after the Great War; (3) his response to historiographical problems surrounding religious history, nationalism, and empiricism; (4) the various ideas of religion present in interwar Britain and the wider Western world by which Dawson informed his thinking not only about religion but also about (5) those “political religions” (as he saw them) taking shape in the totalitarian regimes during the interwar years. The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to general knowledge of interwar British history, aid more historically sensitive readings of Dawson's work today, and reveal something of Dawson's “cultural mind”: the fundamental interdisciplinary and catholic ways of historical thinking by which he viewed the past and the present and which were his most important contributions to the discipline of history.

For my parents, Edward and Fae Stuart, who made me a protagonist.

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Christopher Dawson, ca. 1929
Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections,
University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN, USA.

Acknowledgments

René Descartes (1596-1650) wrote in his *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* (1641) concerning that place in his mind of “serene retreat in peaceful solitude” where he discovered knowledge as self-awareness in the present, independent of the senses, other people, and history. Acknowledgments sections, however, indicate the radical dependency authors have on just these elements. There is a strong desire to acknowledge the help received throughout the history of one’s history-writing. Memory gathers-up the past and expands the present, deepening the sense that in many cases one’s work would not have been possible without the aid of institutions and many kind people. We remain “*dependent* rational animals,”¹ especially in our adulthood and scholarship, though in our pride we sometimes imagine that we leave dependency behind in childhood. Though “acknowledgments” can be a “staging of the self” amidst a particular context on the part of an author,² hopefully, most of all, they are true notes of thanks.

My inspiring undergraduate professor, to whom I owe much, James Gaston, once advised me to find wise and intelligent mentors and to beat a path to their door. I found such mentors in my advisors for this dissertation, James McMillan and Owen Dudley Edwards, at the University of Edinburgh. I found them through my colleague at the University of Edinburgh, Jeffrey Nelson, to whom I also owe a great deal for his friendship, kindness, and stimulating conversation over the years. James McMillan and Owen Dudley Edwards have patiently applied the grindstones of their minds to the dull steel of my own, sharpening me considerably. They have trained me in the great journey of serious historical research and thought. How freeing that adventure is! Their patience, encouragement, and criticisms have been deeply formative for me. As I continue to learn and think throughout my life, my debt to these two men will only increase.

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Peru, Illinois: Carus, 1999).

² Françoise Waquet, "Acknowledgments: Instructions for Use," *Modern Intellectual History* II (2005): 368, 382.

There are many institutions which have made this dissertation possible. To the H. B. Earhart Foundation and my sponsor Vigen Guroian I owe more than words can express. The financial support of this foundation made my first two years of Ph.D. study at the University of Edinburgh possible. The School of History, Classics, and Archaeology at that university granted me several scholarships for which I am very grateful. The British Scholar Society at the University of Texas (Austin) has afforded opportunities to publish through its new journal *British Scholar* and to deliver papers at its annual conferences. The Fondation Catholique Ecossaise and its Vice-President Rev. Michael Regan made study of French and research at the Institut Catholique de Paris possible during August of 2008. I am grateful to the staff of the National Library of Scotland for all of its help over the years, and to Ann Kenne, Head of Special Collections at the University of St. Thomas. Finally, the Wilbur Foundation and the Russell Kirk Center have provided me the freedom, grants, housing, and opportunities for discussion which made it possible for me to finish this dissertation in 2008-2009. The Kirk Center, in Mecosta, Michigan, has given me a true place of “serene retreat in peaceful solitude” (to rehabilitate Descartes’s phrase!), in order to write and compose the final presentation of this dissertation. The President of the Kirk Center, Annette Kirk, has been a constant source of inspiration and friendship for many years. She has been a corner-stone of my life and a constant impetus to pursue higher goals. It was she and her late husband Russell Kirk who inspired me to go to Scotland to pursue higher studies.

Many friends and acquaintances have helped me much. I thank the postgraduate administrator for the School of History, Classics and Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh, Richard Kane, for his unfailing administrative help throughout the course of my studies. Friendship, “Sunday strolls,” and travels in Italy with Robert di Pede have all been sources of joy and much reflection on my methodology in this dissertation. I am grateful to a dynamic and international group of friends centered on the home of that extraordinary Italian couple Maria Ubiali and Giacomo Mazzi which made my time in Edinburgh truly wonderful and more fully human than it otherwise would have been. Italian cooking and Scottish folk songs enlivened many an evening together. I am grateful to those who have provided hospitality to me on various research trips, including Maria and Giacomo, Ken and Christine Cox, Maura and Ian Shanley, Robert and Maria O’Brien, Stratford and Leonie Caldecott, Rev. Michael Kelly, and the Catholic seminary of St. Paul, Minnesota. I also thank the following

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Abbreviations

Archives:

AAW	-	Archives of the Archdiocese of Westminster (Sword of the Spirit Collection)
ACA	-	Amherst College Archives and Special Collections (Robert Frost Collection)
E-JBP	-	University of Edinburgh, Special Collections (John Baillie Papers)
E-JHOP	-	University of Edinburgh, New College Library (J. H. Oldham Papers)
E-UA	-	University of Edinburgh, Special Collections (University Archives)
HDA	-	Harvard Divinity School Archives (Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Christopher Dawson Collection)
JSC	-	Julian Scott Collection (in private possession)
KA	-	University of Keele Special Collections and Archives (Sociological Society and Le Play Archive) KA-AF: Alexander Farquharson Papers GB172 LP/7 KA-VB: Victor Branford Papers GB172 LP/5
NLS	-	National Library of Scotland (John Murray Archive, “Age of the Gods” Acc. 12927/203)
SAA	-	University of St. Andrews Archives (Friedrich von Hügel Collection)
STA	-	University of St. Thomas Archives (Christopher Dawson Collection)
STAC	-	University of St. Thomas Archives (Christina Dawson Scott Papers)

Reference Works:

- OCEL - *Oxford Companion to English Literature* (2000)
- ODNB - *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004); (accessed date)
indicates on-line version used—see: <http://www.oxforddnb.com>
- OED - *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989), online edition
(<http://www.oed.com>)
- WwW - *Who was Who* (London: A & C Black, 1988-2006)

Preface

In 1889 Gustav Eiffel completed his tower in honor of the one-hundredth anniversary of the French Revolution. The World Exhibition in Paris in that year celebrated the achievements of industry and technology. The wrought iron Eiffel Tower; the steel Firth-of-Forth Railway Bridge in Scotland, nearing completion in 1889; and the Alvord Lake Bridge in San Francisco, the first in the United States to be built of reinforced concrete, symbolized the progress of the age and a transition in building materials. In Britain during 1889, W. B. Yeats propelled the Celtic movement forward with his *Wanderings of Oisín*, George Bernard Shaw co-authored *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, and the medical doctor and philosopher James Stirling delivered Edinburgh's first Gifford Lectures. On the London Docks, depicted in, for example, William Lionel Wyllie's painting *Toil, Glitter, Grime, and Wealth on a Flowing Tide* (1883), Cardinal Henry Manning negotiated the Dock Strike of 1889 to a peaceful conclusion, with subsequent foundation of trade unions and confirmation of his ideas in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII (1891). German miners' strikes also broke out during 1889, leading to increased tension between Kaiser Wilhelm II and Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, who resigned in 1890.

In 1889 Charlie Chaplin was born; the first American film, *Fred Ott's Sneeze*, by Thomas Edison, recorded the antics of the inventor's employee; and Adolf Hitler was born on the border between Austria and Germany. The English historians Arnold Toynbee, Eileen Power, and R. G. Collingwood were also born in 1889. The analytic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein was born in Vienna, seat of the Habsburg Empire, and the great historian Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges died in France.

Coulanges, the teacher of sociologist Émile Durkheim, had published his *La Cité antique* in 1864. In that book the French historian wrote of the overwhelming role of religion in the life of the ancient world—an unusual perspective on the classical age, usually celebrated by the Enlightenment for its devotion to reason. “The history of Greece and Rome is a witness and an example of the intimate relation which always exists between men's ideas and their social state. Examine the institutions of the

ancients without thinking of their religious notions, and you find them obscure, whimsical, and inexplicable.”¹ In the year that Coulanges died another historian was born in England who would extend the Frenchman’s thesis beyond the Greeks and Romans to European history as a whole. He would even suggest that this perspective on religion was central to all of world history, and, unlike Coulanges, he would be able to demonstrate his thesis by drawing from the riches of the new sciences of archeology, anthropology, and sociology. His name was Christopher Dawson (1889-1970).

Dawson was born at Hay on the Wye River, which at that point marks the border between England and Wales, far removed from the birth of those forces that would transform the next century, such as film and steel construction and Hitler. He studied history at Trinity College, Oxford. Converting from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism in 1914, Dawson remained on the edges of academia throughout his life. He taught part-time during the 1920s in the History of Culture at Exeter University (then University College of the South West, founded in 1922) and held the Chair of Roman Catholic Studies at Harvard (1958-1962). Dawson worked most of his life as an independent scholar, writing over twenty books, such as *The Age of the Gods* (1928), *Progress and Religion* (1929), and *The Making of Europe* (1932). He was elected to the British Academy in 1943 and gave the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh for 1947-1949. A key theme in his twenty-odd books was summarized helpfully (if glibly) by Arnold Toynbee: “In Dawson’s picture, Religion is not an obstacle that has to be pushed out of the way before the rise of Culture can begin; it is the inspiration and the driving force to which the rise of culture has been due.”²

Dawson was significant because he took up, in a unique way, the intellectual burdens of his age. In notes handwritten sometime during the First World War, Dawson mused on the “radical change brought about by the war....” Even an inconclusive peace, he thought, “could not bring back the old state of things. We are irrevocably committed to a new age & new systems.” “It is impossible,” he continued, “to foresee what the future may bring, it may be disaster, it may be renewed life.

¹ Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (1864; Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, nd), 12.

² Arnold Toynbee, “Religion and the Rise of Western Culture,” review of *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, *The Hibbert Journal: A Quarterly Review of Religion, Theology and Philosophy* XLIX (1950): 4.

What is possible & necessary is to take stock of the factors of the new situation & see as far as possible what alternatives are before this new age.”³ An urge toward renewed life after the war intensified the commitment of some British thinkers to holistic understanding of human life through sociology and to human progress through science. However, for the first time, war had made progress itself into a philosophical problem. That was one of Dawson’s “new factors” that had to be dealt with. Furthermore, the available models of sociology and human progress in Britain left no space for the religious dimension, so without rejecting those models Dawson had to forge a path ahead on his own.

The confused landscape he had to traverse was overgrown with outmoded and potentially dangerous political historical narratives. A new age demanded a new history, but his attempt to inaugurate a history of culture required an “epistemological overhaul”. Obsessed by scientific knowledge, his age often lacked the mental equipment to see new kinds of historical evidence (literary, artistic, religious). Thus, Dawson launched a cultural critique of empirical history.

As a Christian scholar, another dangerous morass he had to wend carefully across was the attack on religion coming from figures such as James Frazer and Sigmund Freud. These men drew much attention during the interwar years, relegating religion to the realm of ignorance or neurosis. Dawson drew from scholars such as William James and Émile Durkheim to recover an historical perspective on religion as a sphere of knowledge with objective social functions in the ways of life of human beings. This unusual historical perspective allowed him to view confidently other “new factors” and mental crises of the post-Great War world: the rise of “new systems” that Dawson dimly foresaw in his notes quoted above: Fascism, Communism, and Nazism. These were symptoms of mental crises, he thought, partly because they developed in the psychological and spiritual vacuum left by the separation of Europe’s traditional religion (Christianity) from its culture.

In facing all of these crises of the mind, Dawson’s intellectual method was to integrate various disciplines of knowledge toward a more comprehensive view of problems and their cultural foundations while trying to avoid automatically transferring the method of one discipline to another, confusing distinct categories.

³ Christopher Dawson’s reflections on “Social Reconstruction & the War,” STA, box 4, folder 111.

This interdisciplinary method and the interwar crises in sociology, human progress, historiography, religion, and politics are the themes of the present thesis.

In his day Dawson was widely read and respected. Attention to him today is rising, but much existent writing on Dawson simply tries to summarize his views on the historical process or on specific time-periods. There is a fundamental lack of real historical perspective on Dawson, linking him to his own intellectual environment. This thesis attempts to remedy that lack. It demonstrates that the most important years in which to understand Dawson's development were roughly those of the interwar period (1918-1939). During those years he engaged in not only scholarly work, but also wrote extensively on social and political problems in the world around him. This thesis uses Dawson's life and writings as a window into the interwar period—hence it is a “study in British intellectual history between the world wars.”

Ever since his death in 1970, some Catholic writers in Britain and especially North America have attempted to keep alive Dawson's legacy. Some of them have attempted to assess the “relevance” of Dawson's corpus of writings to the perceived problems of the present. These writers have interpreted Dawson as a prophet as much as an historian. They have written popular articles such as “A Vision to Regain? Reconsidering Christopher Dawson” highlighting Dawson's diagnosis of the “ills of modern culture” and the “process of secularization”.⁴ Other writings have appeared during the last several years summarizing Dawson's “vision” or claiming that he was one of the “most important historians of the last century” by aligning him with certain apologetical narratives about the importance of religion in human culture, or the centrality of Christianity to a so-called “European identity,” or the perceived dangers of secularization in the modern world.⁵ These writings are essentially acts of *piety* (in

⁴ Fernando Cervantes, “A Vision to Regain? Reconsidering Christopher Dawson (1889-1970),” *New Blackfriars* LXX (October 1989): 442, 443. See also: Fernando Cervantes, “Progress and Tradition: Christopher Dawson and Contemporary Thought,” *Logos* II (Spring 1999); R. V. Young, “A Dawsonian View of Patriarchy,” *Modern Age* XLIX (Fall 2007).

⁵ Gerald Russello, “Historic Reality and Future Hope: Christopher Dawson's Vision of Christianity and Culture,” Witherspoon Lecture (7 November 2003) at the Family Research Council, in Washington, DC, available at <http://www.mappingamerica.org> (accessed 25 February 2009). Also: Robert Royal, “Dawson's History: Resurrecting the Work of Christopher Dawson,” *Weekly Standard* (17 March 2003); Bradley J. Birzer, “Christopher Dawson: *The Historian of the Twentieth Century*,” *St. Austin Review* (September/October 2005); Bradley J. Birzer, *Sanctifying the World: The Augustinian Life and Mind of Christopher Dawson* (Front Royal, Virginia: Christendom Press, 2007); Stratford Caldecott and John Morrill, eds., *Eternity in Time: Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997).

the classical sense⁶), written for an audience sharing basic assumptions, and making some valuable contributions. Indeed, such attention helped rouse a new interest in the English historian after 1990, a new interest that has culminated in the republication of his major works by the Catholic University of America Press in the early twenty-first century.⁷

The popular accounts of Dawson mentioned above have kept alive an interest in an historian dead nearly forty years, no small feat in the abundant world of historiography. However, such accounts by mostly Catholic admirers have sometimes led to an instrumentalist, a-historical appropriation of Dawson's works too closely in the service of contemporary interests and their agendas—like in that extraordinary statement of a publisher's advertisement for a new biography of Dawson: "One can find his [Dawson's] influence throughout the twentieth-century Catholic Right."⁸ While the recent reception history of Dawson may suggest this to be partly true, Dawson himself never identified in his day with any "Catholic Right". In fact, it was that faction (in the person of Douglas Jerrold, a publisher and Franco supporter) which opposed Dawson's broad editorial policy at *The Dublin Review* and so ousted him in 1944.⁹ Another example: one author links him to that movement resistant to liturgical change after the Second Vatican Council and uses this link to argue vaguely that Dawson was an "anti-modern rebel,"¹⁰ whatever that might mean, despite the facts that Dawson was spiritually close to Friedrich von Hügel (the Catholic modernist), was an early pioneer in the ecumenical movement, and worked all of his life to convince his readers of the importance of modern disciplines such as sociology for historical study. Such problems in the reception of Dawson were noticed even in the 1980s when Adrian Hastings, author of *A History of English Christianity* (1986), wrote to Christina Scott, Dawson's daughter and first biographer: "How *truly* absurd

⁶ *Pietas*: "A sense of respect, or duty towards an ancestor, country, etc." "Pietas," OED (accessed 25 February 2009).

⁷ *Progress and Religion* (1929, 2001); *Medieval Essays* (1954, 2002); *The Making of Europe* (1932, 2003); *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (1933, 2009); and *Understanding Europe* (1952, 2009).

⁸ Christendom Press (Christendom College, Virginia), Fall & Winter Catalog 2009-2010, p. 3. The biography in question is Bradley Birzer's *Sanctifying the World: The Augustinian Life and Mind of Christopher Dawson* (2007).

⁹ Robert Speaight, *The Property Basket* (London: Collins & Harvill, 1970), 220-221.

¹⁰ Adam Schwartz, "'I Thought the Church and I Wanted the Same Thing': Opposition to Twentieth-Century Liturgical Change in the Thought of Graham Greene, Christopher Dawson, and David Jones," *Logos* I (1998): 48; Adam Schwartz, *The Third Spring: G. K. Chesterton, Graham Greene, Christopher Dawson, and David Jones* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

that American Catholic sectaries should be adopting your father as their patron saint.”¹¹

Nevertheless, during his own day Dawson was admired as someone possessing a “mastery” over massed historical material and opening up exciting new horizons of research.¹² Therefore, critical questions need to be asked about Dawson and his reception in the twenty-first century: what if a reader strongly disagrees with the narratives of secularization or European identity advanced so boldly by contemporary and largely devout North American writers in their interpretations of Dawson? What is there in Dawson’s historiography and thought for a wider audience? What is there in his books and methodology relevant to historians and the educated reader not already convinced of very particular religious interpretations of history filtered through very particular contemporary perspectives and concerns? How was Dawson viewed in his day and how did he advance the study of history?

One scholar wrote that, “To appropriate [Dawson’s] work, to give it official sanction for partisan purposes, would not only be a mutilation of the universality of his message. It would be a betrayal. A betrayal of his vision, a betrayal of his integrity as a scholar and intellectual....”¹³ Writers may have misrepresented Dawson partly because of ambiguity in his own writings. While it is true that during the Second World War he became somewhat more polemical than in his early scholarship, it remains the responsibility of later readers and historians to try to understand him accurately. Historian John Rodden writes of the literary reputation of George Orwell (1903-1950) and his appropriation by political writers on both the Left and the Right. He notes that the “politics of reception cannot be divorced from the *ethics* of reception.” Intellectuals and interpreters of past figures such as an Orwell (or a Dawson) should have a “moral awareness,” an “ethics of admiration,” disciplining their perspective. Otherwise, it is too easy for readers to identify so strongly with the writer that they project their own needs and aspirations on him or her.¹⁴

¹¹ Adrian Hastings to Christina Scott, 5 October 1986, STAC, box 1, folder “Correspondence with Adrian Hastings.”

¹² Gervase Matthew, “Religion in History,” review of *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 April 1950, Religious Book Section, vii.

¹³ Cervantes, “Progress and Tradition: Christopher Dawson and Contemporary Thought,” 106.

¹⁴ John Rodden, *Every Intellectual's Big Brother: George Orwell's Literary Siblings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 181, 182.

This thesis has attempted to find a new and more disciplined way of writing about Dawson. Dawson once wrote of Rousseau that, “In order to understand him aright, we must see him against the intellectual background of his age.”¹⁵ By focusing on the historical context and early work of Dawson himself, I have attempted to see him in just such a way. I have historicized his arguments, methods, and perspectives as a precondition to more fully understanding them and their relevance to today. The first rule has been to try to *understand* the early, formative period of his historical context in as disinterested a way as possible. In this way I hope to avoid simplistic, ahistorical abstractions of his ideas on religion and culture and history that one can easily make when failing to do the empirical work necessary in order to interpret him (or anyone) in context. How can Dawson be understood in his historical context, as a phenomenon of interwar Britain? How did he engage with his post-Versailles world as he came to intellectual maturity and began to publish? I want to use his life and work as a window into the period 1918-1939, focusing on key intellectual developments in the fields that Dawson himself engaged with: sociology, human progress, historiography, religious theory, and politics. These will be the series of contexts through which I will attempt to study Dawson and his period. How was Dawson a product of all of these contexts and how did he engage with them? What logic or method of thought emerged from below the surface of his writing which might explain his effectiveness in these fields as an intellectual historian? How does the reader acquire a new way of thinking about the past when encountering Dawson-in-context? Those are the questions driving this thesis.

By attempting to explain Dawson’s logic of historical thinking, rather than simply summarizing his thoughts on religion or culture, I hope a more sophisticated account of any “relevance” this historian might have for the twenty-first century will emerge. “Relevance” must consist of more than claiming a figure of the past as part of the genealogy of one’s own perspective in the present. We must be careful of lazily trying to make the dead do our thinking for us. “We need to reckon with the fact that thinking is an effortful activity...”¹⁶ Perhaps the true “relevance” of the past consists more in its *difference* than its similarity to us today. The value of historical study is

¹⁵ Christopher Dawson, “Comments of Middleton Murry’s Paper,” E-JHOP, box 14, folder 4. There is no date on these comments, but it was likely written between 1938 and 1941 when Dawson was involved with the Moot.

¹⁶ Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” in *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), by Quentin Skinner, vol. 1: 88.

that it helps us “stand back from our own assumptions and systems of belief, and thereby to situate ourselves in relation to other and very different forms of life.”¹⁷ Such a situation then drives us to critical self-reflection and awareness—extending my intellectual options and testing them heuristically against each other.

This thesis is not an intellectual biography or a narrative intellectual history of interwar Britain—but something in between. It is a depiction of a man’s thought and his historical world, an ecology—not an etiology—of his writings. But a brief depiction of the man before an extended discussion of his thought is in order. In appearance, Dawson was dark-haired and a very thin five-foot-ten-inches in height. In the early 1930s he grew a beard and resembled D. H. Lawrence. He was short-sighted, and as a university student at Oxford he acutely felt physically inferior to others. This feeling of insecurity combined with an intense shyness throughout his life. He disliked giving public lectures so much that sometimes his wife Valery would read them to his audience. He was so unpractical that Valery also managed their lives: paying the bills, finding schools for their three children, sometimes even copying her husband’s articles and reviews in her clearer hand. All of his life Dawson suffered from chronic insomnia and bouts of depression—his active mind wrestling with new ideas or worrying that his books were not appreciated enough by Catholics.¹⁸ He possessed great intellectual strength and could be “determined to the point of obstinacy,” Christina Scott remarked. There was virility in his character. He possessed a “strong sense of humour and an optimism in his view of life which was supported by his religious faith. His friends remembered him best for his dark expressive eyes, which betrayed every mood and feeling, and his shy but attractive smile.”¹⁹ He was warm and friendly when conversing with friends, and he would try to meet each person at his or her own intellectual level—he was not pompous or pontifical and never malicious. After his death, one acquaintance, the novelist Ralph Ricketts, remembered visiting Dawson, then in his mid sixties, on the Devon coast. “He gave an impression of fastidiousness which was embodied in his slight, neat figure, his clothes and demeanour; his light, quick movements; his voice and thin white hands. I recall a mixture of venerability and youthfulness; his courtesy; the infectious...little

¹⁷ ———, “Interpretation and the Understanding of Speech Acts,” in *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), by Quentin Skinner, vol. 1: 125.

¹⁸ Birzer, *Sanctifying the World: The Augustinian Life and Mind of Christopher Dawson*, 38-40; Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson* (1984; New Brunswick: Transaction, 1992), 81.

¹⁹ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 42-43.

laugh he gave when he was amused....” “To some extent,” Ricketts continued, “you had to bend to his mood and wishes: if he was tired or bored, he made little effort to disguise it; in fact, he made little social effort of any kind. He was completely natural, like a child.”²⁰ During the late 1920s, while teaching at Exeter and living in Dawlish, Dawson’s relaxations included listening to classical music on a newly acquired radio (Beethoven and Mozart were his favorites), talking with friends, or taking walks along the cliffs or sand dunes at low tide. Christina Scott wrote that while history, religion, and literature surrounded her childhood home life in Dawlish, it was not an “overpoweringly religious or intellectual atmosphere in which to be brought up.”²¹

Dawson was remembered for his encyclopedic mind. The publisher Maisie Ward wrote that, “Letters to Dawson from an expert in Indian religions treat him as a fellow expert; from an expert on the history of the Irish in the United States, as an equal in that field also.” She recounted: “From Chinese dynasties to American Indians, from prehistory to the Oxford Movement, from Virgil to the latest novel or even ‘Western’, Christopher can talk of anything although you can also find him plunged in an almost unbreakable silence and impervious to the people and things around.”²²

Note: US spelling is maintained throughout this thesis. Historical characters are normally introduced the first time they are mentioned in the text—or in a footnote—with dates indicating their life-span. Where this is not the case, that person will usually appear later in the text with a fuller description. See Appendix A for a contextual chronology of Dawson’s life. Book reviews published in *The Times Literary Supplement* were usually anonymous, but the names of the authors have been included in this thesis.

Joseph T. Stuart
Mecosta, Michigan
20 August 2009

²⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 173-174.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 78, 82.

²² Maisie Ward, *Unfinished Business* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1964), 117-118.

Introduction

“A thought is fully as much an event as a war, and thinking falls into observable patterns which, in turn, have histories of their own, no less a part of the ongoing life of humanity than the more conventional subject matter of historical research.”—W. Warren Wagar (1969)¹

This thesis aims to make a contribution to Dawson studies and to the intellectual history of Britain in the period roughly between the years 1918 and 1939. It also seeks to investigate the elements of Dawson’s historical thinking. In order to recover these elements, and therefore reveal something of his contribution to history, it will be necessary to view the ways in which he interacted as a thinker with various contexts. This will require preliminary attention to the techniques and goals of intellectual history.

What is intellectual history or the history of ideas? For the moment the terms are interchangeable. There are many varieties of this kind of history, and no universal method for its practice. According to Donald Kelley, the phrase “history of ideas” arose in association with the history of philosophy in the eighteenth century. But it was in early nineteenth-century France that *l’histoire des idées* took on an independent practice in the work of Victor Cousin (1792-1867). Cousin’s “Eclectic” philosophy attempted to draw from the entire history of philosophies in order to transcend them all, and in proceeding thus he first sought real historical understanding by testing heuristically ideas from different schools of philosophy.² “Eclecticism” would continue to characterize the history of ideas until today.

In the English-speaking world, the first formal work of intellectual history may have been *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876) by Leslie Stephen. One also thinks of Lord Acton’s unfinished history of liberty, and J. B. Bury’s *A History of Freedom of Thought* (1914) and *The Idea of Progress* (1920). Christopher Dawson

¹ W. Warren Wagar, ed., *The Idea of Progress Since the Renaissance* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1969), 1.

² Donald R. Kelley, *The Descent of Ideas: The History of Intellectual History* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 7, 10, 14.

published his *Progress and Religion* in 1929, but by the 1930s it appeared that the history of ideas was largely an un-British activity.³

In the United States, matters were different. Arthur O. Lovejoy, trained in philosophy by William James, published *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (1936) and became the moving force behind the new *Journal of the History of Ideas* in 1940. Other American intellectual historians included Carl Becker (e.g., *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, 1932) and Perry Miller (e.g., *The New England Mind*, 1939). After the Second World War this new field commanded great respect and popularity. However, during the 1960s and 1970s, with the rise of social history, the position of the history of ideas in the United States dropped sharply.⁴

In Britain during the 1970s and 1980s the University of Sussex proved hospitable to the discipline, and some spoke of a “Sussex School” of intellectual history.⁵ Recently, the field has experienced a new awakening at Cambridge, especially in early modern political thought. Quentin Skinner, regius professor of modern history at Cambridge (1996-2007), is an intellectual historian and an editor of the influential monograph series entitled “Ideas in Context” for Cambridge University Press since 1984. Cambridge has also published the new *Modern Intellectual History* journal since 2004.

The terms “intellectual history” and “history of ideas” are often used interchangeably. However, John Burrow (1935-2010), Professor of European Thought (Oxford), cautioned, “I myself mildly prefer ‘intellectual history’ to the perhaps more familiar ‘history of ideas’, as registering, by analogy with ‘political’ or ‘economic’ history, an attention to forms of human activity rather than to some historical encounter of abstract categories.”⁶ Donald Kelley, editor of the *Journal of the History*

³ Brian Young, “Intellectual History in Britain,” in *Advances in Intellectual History*, ed. Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 26.

⁴ Anthony Grafton, “The History of Ideas: Precept and Practice, 1950-2000 and Beyond,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* LXVII (2006): 1-2, 3, 19.

⁵ Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young, eds., *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History 1750-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4.

⁶ John W. Burrow, “Intellectual History in English Academic Life: Reflections on a Revolution,” in *Advances in Intellectual History*, ed. Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 11.

of *Ideas* for seventeen years, agreed with those sentiments if only to lay to rest the ghosts of idealism associated with early practitioners of the field such as Lovejoy.⁷

Intellectual historians today agree that their discipline is not characterized by any one method as much as it is “a supremely interdisciplinary enterprise” which has pioneered (and continues to do so) interdisciplinary activity among historians and allied disciplines (especially literary studies and philosophy).⁸ Lovejoy announced this as the task of the *Journal of the History of Ideas* in 1940.⁹ In 2004, *Modern Intellectual History* echoed the call by declaring that it would serve as a “meeting ground and a mediator for hermeneutically minded scholars with an historical orientation, whether their interest is in the history of literature, science, philosophy, law, religion, political thought, economic thought, social theory, psychology, anthropology, art, or music.”¹⁰ Because Dawson’s work itself was so interdisciplinary, intellectual history offers the best tools with which to approach him.

Relations between intellectual history and philosophy are especially important because intellectual history grew out of the history of philosophy and the history of political theory. There can be a “philosopher’s history,” however, which is distinct from intellectual history. In his *Short History of Modern Philosophy*, Roger Scruton declares: “My concern is to describe the content of philosophical conclusions and arguments, and not the contexts in which they occurred or the influences which led to them.” He distinguishes between the task of the intellectual historian attempting to describe the immense influence of Rousseau’s *Social Contract*, for example, and the philosophical task of approaching that document with the intention of understanding its conclusions in the interest of determining their truth.¹¹ While one might wonder if it is even possible to understand Rousseau apart from his influence, histories of philosophy have nevertheless played a major role in the evolution of intellectual history as a discipline. This has been the case particularly with philosophers possessing deep historical interests, such as Isaiah Berlin and R. G. Collingwood.

⁷ Donald R. Kelley, “What is Happening to the History of Ideas?,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* LI (1990): 18.

⁸ Brian Young, “Introduction,” in *Advances in Intellectual History*, ed. Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1.

⁹ Arthur O. Lovejoy, “Reflections on the History of Ideas,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* I (1940). See also his introductory chapter on “The Study of the History of Ideas” in Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1936).

¹⁰ See the Editorial for *Modern Intellectual History* I (2004): 2.

¹¹ Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy* (1981; New York: Routledge, 1995), viii, 10, 11.

More recently, British political theorist Mark Bevir published a philosophical treatise on the forms of reasoning appropriate to the field, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (1999). Contemporary philosophers who have created vital links between their discipline and intellectual history in addressing present concerns include Alasdair MacIntyre (e.g., *After Virtue*, 1981) and Charles Taylor (e.g., *A Secular Age*, 2007).

If philosophers sometimes try to utilize intellectual history to address contemporary concerns, intellectual historians share a sense that their discipline connects past and present in a unique way. Quentin Skinner writes that the value of studying intellectual history consists in the exciting possibility of a “dialogue between philosophical analysis and historical evidence,” making the study of past belief and thought “relevant” not because “crude ‘lessons’ can be picked out of them, but because the history itself can provide a lesson in self-knowledge.”¹² The “relevance” of past beliefs, Skinner states elsewhere, is found precisely in their alien character. “The kind of enquiry I am describing offers us an additional means of reflecting on what we believe, and thus of strengthening our present beliefs by way of testing them against alternative possibilities, or else of improving them if we come to recognize that the alternatives are both possible and desirable.”¹³ For John Burrow, the task of the intellectual historian is one of “negotiation” or “translation” between historical periods. That effort first requires a patient “eavesdropping” on the conversations of the past and coming to understand them as one learns a natural language.¹⁴ For the American historian Dominick LaCapra intellectual history is both a reconstruction of the past and a “dialogue” or a “conversation” with it. The relation is two-way, for description of another period is never pure. Indeed, he argues, the extremes of pure description and pure interpretation of the past are both fundamentally ahistorical bids for transcendence over the finite nature of understanding.¹⁵

Transcendence, however, is emphatically not the goal of intellectual history. The discipline arose as an attempt to bring ideas down from the timeless realm of “truth”

¹² Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” in *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), by Quentin Skinner, vol. 1: 87, 89. This chapter is a revised version of an article that originally appeared under the same title in *History and Theory* 8 (1969): 3-53.

¹³ ———, “Interpretation and the Understanding of Speech Acts,” in *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), by Quentin Skinner, vol. 1: 126-127. This chapter is an adapted version of Skinner’s final section of “Reply to my Critics” in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics*, ed. James Tully (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 259-88.

¹⁴ Burrow, “Intellectual History in English Academic Life: Reflections on a Revolution,” 21-23.

¹⁵ Dominick LaCapra, “Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts,” in *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 61-63.

into the messy historical and social world of humans and their institutions—hence the title of Donald Kelley’s history of intellectual history *The Descent of Ideas* (2002). Intellectual history, then, is partly about the “descent of ideas” into a context—“ideas in context,” as the title of the Cambridge monograph series proclaims. For its practitioners, the “eclectic desire to understand, contextualize, and take seriously the truth claims of every philosophical or cultural tradition has given intellectual historians their distinctive disciplinary identity.”¹⁶ Christopher Dawson himself engaged in a wide conversation with world cultures, and saw ideas and philosophical traditions as rooted in particular cultures. He wrote: “The more learned and conscientious a historian is, the more conscious he is of the relativity of his own knowledge, and the more ready he is to treat the culture that he is studying as an end in itself, an autonomous world which follows its own laws and owes no allegiance to the standards and ideals of another civilization.”¹⁷ Thus, perhaps the primary task of the intellectual historian is not to affirm truths and refute errors, but to *describe* thinking human beings in their contexts. Of course this does not mean that an intellectual historian could not also step beyond his discipline and make normative arguments as can any other person.

This thesis is about Christopher Dawson and his context. Why is “context” important? Context is important because the purpose of this thesis is to contribute to general knowledge of interwar British history, aid more historically sensitive readings of Dawson’s work today, and reveal something of the fundamental interdisciplinary and catholic ways of historical thinking by which Dawson viewed the past and the present and which were his most important contributions to the discipline of history. The study of context will reveal and test Dawson’s ways of thinking against the real world, viewing him *in action* as an historical protagonist.

But what exactly is “context”? How can historians come to know past contexts? These are crucial questions for intellectual historians to consider. There are four important kinds of historical contexts of ideas to distinguish, all of which yield

¹⁶ Lloyd Kramer, “Intellectual History and Philosophy,” *Modern Intellectual History* I (2004): 85.

¹⁷ Christopher Dawson, “The Kingdom of God and History,” in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1956; Wilmington: ISI Books, 2002), 286. This essay was first published in *The Kingdom of God and History*, ed. by H. G. Woods *et al.*; (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938).

important perspectives utilized in this thesis: textual contexts, social contexts, cultural contexts, and biographical contexts.¹⁸

1. Textual Contexts. The historians of political thought Quentin Skinner, John Dunn, and J. G. A. Pocock founded—it has been casually said—the “Cambridge School” of the history of political thought around 1970. Attempting to bring the old “canon” of classic political texts into closer relation with history, they put at the center of their discipline the study of texts *in their context*. They have helped bring to prominence concepts such as textual “languages” and available “discourses”. Textual context has been defined largely in terms of “understanding new ideas as responses to previously existing ideas” (in society, institutions) and in studying relationships between texts.¹⁹ This is the goal of the Cambridge monograph series, which mostly studies the early modern period (1450-1800). Skinner, in particular, tries to describe a hermeneutic appropriate for the intellectual historian which views “texts as acts” so that the process of understanding them “requires us, as in the case of all voluntary acts, to recover the intentions embodied in their performance.” This involves more than simply reading a text at face-value, but asking the question *why* a certain position has been taken. Far from losing sight of actual texts behind the host of contemporary interpretations of them, as some postmodernist writers imply and even recommend,²⁰ Skinner’s methods point to the real possibility of historical (and even philosophical) understanding. In order to achieve that, scholars must study the social and political context of the text, the discourse surrounding it, and ask what the author was *doing* by writing it?²¹ What does a text say and what did it try to do?

¹⁸ I have relied heavily on two very helpful discussions of kinds of context; see Brian Cowan, “Intellectual, Social and Cultural History: Ideas in Context,” in *Advances in Intellectual History*, ed. Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); LaCapra, “Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts.”

¹⁹ Cowan, “Intellectual, Social and Cultural History: Ideas in Context,” 172.

²⁰ F. R. Ankersmit, “Historiography and Postmodernism,” in *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. Keith Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1997). Ankersmit: The postmodernist view “does not point towards the *past* but to other *interpretations* of the past;” thus he proclaims the “contemporization of the historical source” (287) and concludes that, “The time has come that we should *think* about the past, rather than *investigate* it” (294). Contrast this with a response article: Perez Zagorin, “Historiography and Postmodernism: Reconsiderations,” in *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. Keith Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1997).

²¹ Skinner, “Interpretation and the Understanding of Speech Acts,” 104, 112, 114, 115, 118, 120. For Skinner’s criticism of Derrida and affirmation of gaining understanding of past intentions expressed through a text-act, see p. 122. See also: J. G. A. Pocock, “Introduction: The State of the Art,” in *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

The philosopher R. G. Collingwood made this point in another way: it is not enough to read what an author has written to understand the meaning. One must also know what the question was in the mind of the author (and presumed to be in the reader's mind) to which what the author said was an answer. But to know the question in the author's mind, and to know the particular contemporary problems motivating a response, requires historical investigation into the author's time. This is the basis of Collingwood's "logic of question and answer".²²

After all, perhaps, "Il est encore plus facile de juger de l'esprit d'un homme par ses questions que par ses réponses."²³ The recovery of questions asked by Dawson and the kinds of questions asked by this thesis can be platforms by which to judge both. But the journey from the surface of Dawson's texts, the answers he gives, back through the decades to his day and to its problems, requires patience and sympathy. The German-language poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) once wrote to his young admirer Franz Kappus: "be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and...try to love the *questions themselves* like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. ...Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."²⁴ If nothing is as intellectually meaningless as answers to questions that are not asked, Collingwood's logic and Rilke's advice will prove useful as this thesis tries to understand Dawson, his texts, and his questions.

An exciting development in the study of past texts is the turn to historiography as a kind of intellectual history. This form of history treats past works of history as artifacts from the period in which they were written. For example, what can Gibbon's famous study of the decline of Rome tell historians today about the eighteenth century—the century during which Gibbon lived? With this aim in mind, J. G. A. Pocock is writing *Barbarism and Religion* (four volumes to date, 1999-2005) on Edward Gibbon and the many mental worlds which informed the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Another example is Reba Soffer's recent intellectual history of historiography called *History, Historians, and Conservatism in Britain and America*:

²² R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (1939; Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 31, 37, 39. For another and more recent "logic" (or form of reasoning) available to the intellectual historian, see Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²³ Pierre Marc Gaston, *Maximes et réflexions sur différents sujets de morale et de politique* (Paris: 1808), maxim xvii. "It is easier to judge the mind of a man by his questions rather than his answers."

²⁴ Rilke to Kappus, 16 July 1903, in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. M. D. Herter Norton (1929; London: W. W. Norton, 1954), 27.

The Great War to Thatcher and Reagan (2009). Implicit in these studies of historiography is the impossibility of fully understanding past mental worlds without wrestling with the views of history present therein. Consequently, the study of past historiography is an important part of intellectual history today, and a recurring theme of this thesis.

2. Social Contexts. At the same time that “textual context” intellectual history developed (1960s to the 1980s), a different way of studying ideas in context arose among French historians and historians of France. This was the social history of ideas, or the history of “*mentalités*” or *civilizations* growing out of the Annales School pioneered by Marc Bloch (1886-1944) and Lucien Febvre (1878-1956). This movement developed alongside social and economic history to study the “mental worlds” of the past and how people made sense of their existence. Cowan notes that the subjects of the history of *mentalités* were “rarely articulate texts written by clerics or intelligentsia, but rather feelings, beliefs and superstitions. ...[Texts] were more often used as a window into a wider mental world than as the subject of sustained enquiry in and of themselves.”²⁵ Examples included Marc Bloch’s *Les Rois thaumaturges* (1924) and Lucien Febvre’s *Le Problème de l’incroyance au XVI^e siècle: le religion de Rabelais* (1942). These works related ideas and beliefs to their social worlds.

The phrase “social history of ideas” was not associated with Bloch and Febvre but rather with, for example, the American historian of France Robert Darnton and his pioneering book *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie 1775-1800* (1979). The context that Darnton investigated around the *Encyclopédie* was not other texts, but the cut-throat business world of eighteenth-century publishing in order to trace the diffusion of the book.²⁶

3. Cultural contexts. From the 1980s through the 1990s it seemed to some cultural historians better to avoid anchoring “society” to any specific group of people and instead focus on ways in which the social order was *represented*.²⁷ Thus, cultural historians study how almost any phenomenon (foreigners, personal identities, bodies, nations, traditions) has been represented, symbolized, imagined, and constructed by

²⁵ Cowan, “Intellectual, Social and Cultural History: Ideas in Context,” 176.

²⁶ Robert Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie 1775-1800* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap, 1979), 4.

²⁷ Cowan, “Intellectual, Social and Cultural History: Ideas in Context,” 180.

human beings in the past.²⁸ Mark Bevir writes that patterns of family life, debates in politics, religious observances, technology and many other things are all cultural phenomena. These phenomena convey *meanings*, or the intentions of their creators. Historians of ideas are students of culture because they study meaning from an historical perspective cast upon various relics left over from the past.²⁹

For intellectual historians, the cultural history of ideas tends to favor studying the forms in which ideas were conveyed rather than the content of those ideas themselves.³⁰ In this way, an emphasis on the institutions, power structures, and geography involved in the spread of ideas and knowledge is seen in the socio-cultural approach of Peter Burke's 2000 book *A Social History of Knowledge from Gutenberg to Diderot*. Burke's book represents that estuary where social and cultural history mix. These two kinds of history also mix in the new journal (founded 2004) *Cultural and Social History*, and in the founding of the "Cambridge Social and Cultural Histories" by the Cambridge University Press in the same year.³¹

Two objects of knowledge, then, are central for intellectual historians of today: texts (the "Cambridge School") and Bevir's relics, defined broadly as anything from paintings and utensils to books. The first tends to focus more on the "inside" of texts (the content) and their relations to other texts, and hence is more philosophical, while the other tends to focus more on the "outside" of relics in their relation to a part of society or to their cultural representation or meaning.

4. Biographical Contexts. Finally, there is a kind of intellectual history that I call the "biographical study". This is identified, for example, in two books published in 2007: Matthew Stanley's *Practical Mystic: Religion, Science, and A. S. Eddington*, and Peter Stanlis's *Robert Frost: The Poet as Philosopher*.³² Neither of these books is a comprehensive biography in the traditional sense, as in Christina Scott's biography³³ of Dawson which relates all the main events and thoughts and persons involved in the life of its subject. The purpose of her book was to tell the story of Dawson's life. The

²⁸ See: Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

²⁹ Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, 1, 31, 32.

³⁰ Cowan, "Intellectual, Social and Cultural History: Ideas in Context," 180.

³¹ Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge from Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000). Burke's first chapter is a very useful discussion comparing "Sociologies and Histories of Knowledge".

³² Matthew Stanley, *Practical Mystic: Religion, Science, and A. S. Eddington* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007); Peter J. Stanlis, *Robert Frost: The Poet as Philosopher* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2007).

³³ Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson* (1984; New Brunswick: Transaction, 1992).

books of Stanley and Stanlis do not seek so much to narrate the lives of their subjects as to use those lives as windows onto a wider mental world and to focus and historicize a broader philosophical discussion. Both books contain thematic chapters arranged loosely in chronological order. Stanley locates the modern debate between religion and science in the specific life and context of the Quaker astronomer A. S. Eddington (1882-1944), who helped confirm Einstein's general theory of relativity in 1919. Stanley seeks to locate those "valence values" or shared normative guides for behavior in Eddington's religious life *and* his scientific life. He demonstrates these values "in action" by a series of chapters dealing with those episodes or themes in which Eddington's religion intersected with his science (as in his pacifism and commitment to internationalism during the Great War).³⁴ Stanlis's book examines the philosophy of the American poet Robert Frost (1874-1963) and argues that *dualism* was the basis of Frost's total but unsystematic view of reality.³⁵ Stanlis makes his case by illustrating the way dualism affected Frost's thinking on a host of subjects: chapter three is on Frost and evolution, for example, and chapter eight is on Frost and Einstein's theory, while chapter ten is on Frost and education. Stanley and Stanlis have written about the contingent details of past human lives, while resurrecting them into larger concerns whose interest transcends one life and one time. These two books, significantly, model a way of writing history that raises history above mere chronicling and stamp-collecting by introducing readers to a *form of reasoning* (a "logic," in Marc Bevir's sense³⁶) by which their subjects interacted with the world around them. Those logics provide uniting themes of the books. At the same time, both of these biographical studies remain works of history which examine particular themes in the intellectual and social context of their subjects and the ways that the lives and thoughts of Eddington or Frost interacted with that context.

These two purposes are also those of this thesis: accounting for a logic or a method of thought in Dawson's texts, and studying his life and texts as phenomena of interwar British history by viewing his texts as *acts* in response to social and intellectual dilemmas around him. If a writer "can be peculiarly representative of his

³⁴ Stanley, *Practical Mystic: Religion, Science, and A. S. Eddington*, 5-6, 9. Eddington's Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh were published as the immensely popular book *The Nature of the Physical World* in 1928. He was known for his lucid philosophical reflections on the implications of modern physics, and influenced Dawson's thinking in *Progress and Religion* (1929).

³⁵ Stanlis, *Robert Frost: The Poet as Philosopher*, 1. Dualism: reality consists of two distinct realms, such as spirit and matter, as opposed to *monism*.

³⁶ Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, 2.

age or craft by the very fact of his distinctiveness,”³⁷ then the case of Christopher Dawson will be instructive concerning the interwar period because his writings addressed major issues facing his generation: war, social dislocation, economic depression, environmental destruction, the social role of religion, the rise of political ideology, and the interpretation of the past through historiography. In these efforts, he was not only an historian but also something of an “intellectual hero,”³⁸ engaging with the conflicts of his time. This he did especially during the 1930s and 1940s, when he spoke to the moment and aimed to shape his present through works such as *The Judgment of the Nations* (1942).

Since this thesis is not a traditional biography, it does not study Dawson’s entire life. Why is *interwar* British history the focus? Because that was when Dawson matured as a scholar in response to key events that crucially shaped his historical and social thought. Born in 1889, Dawson was not quite twenty-five years old when the Great War started. He was thirty-nine when he published his first book in 1928, forty when the American stock market crashed in 1929, and fifty when Hitler invaded Poland in 1939. Between the outbreak of the First World War and the publication of his first book, Dawson read voluminously. It was the period 1914 – 1928 in which his thinking matured, and especially after 1918 that world events raised questions in his mind which affected his whole perspective on historiography and society. For example, he wrote in his personal notebook sometime during the mid 1920s that, “All the events of the last years have convinced me what a fragile thing civilisation is & how near we are to losing the whole inheritance which our age might have enjoyed.”³⁹ His first three books, *The Age of the Gods* (1928), *Progress and Religion* (1929), and *The Making of Europe* (1932) were the result of study and lecturing throughout the 1920s. Thus, the most important years of Dawson’s intellectual development were from the outbreak of the Great War until the early 1930s by which time his major scholarly works had appeared and Dawson then changed the focus of his writing toward contemporary issues. This early phase of Dawson’s life as a scholar, in which he combined scholarship with penetrating insight into the post-Great War intellectual environment, is a major focus of this thesis.

³⁷ John Rodden, *The Politics of Literary Reputation: The Making and Claiming of 'St. George' Orwell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 11.

³⁸ Victor Brombert, *The Intellectual Hero: Studies in the French Novel* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961).

³⁹ Christopher Dawson’s Notebook, STA, box 9, folder 18 “Notebook 1922-1925 Philosophy”.

This thesis will concentrate on the interwar context of these and other early writings of Dawson, as well as various later works which were largely grounded in sources from the interwar period. These later books include his Gifford Lectures (published in 1948 and 1950), and *The Gods of Revolution*, published posthumously in 1972 but mostly written during the 1930s. Hence, the interwar period matured Dawson as an historian and framed the essential questions to which much of his work responded. He was essentially an interwar thinker.

There are many political and social studies of interwar history in Britain, such as C. L. Mowat's *Britain between the Wars, 1918-1940* (1955) and A. J. P. Taylor's *English History 1914-1945* (1965). However, the historiography of the intellectual history of the British interwar period is small. *The Twentieth-Century Mind: History, Ideas, and Literature in Britain* (volume 2: 1918-1945) appeared in 1972.⁴⁰ This is a very useful work by different authors on developments in historiography, social thought, theology, physics, and many other fields linking Britain to intellectual currents in the wider world. Adrian Hastings published *A History of English Christianity 1920-1985*, which included several chapters attempting to describe the intellectual developments of the interwar period.⁴¹ Maurice Cowling published his three-volume work *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England* in 1980-2001. Most recently, Richard Overy has published *The Morbid Age* (2009) in which he argues that the idea of "crisis" possessed wide explanatory power and social impact during the interwar years.⁴²

This thesis will draw from secondary studies such as the above as well as a broad variety of contemporary sources from the interwar period. The most important body of sources is that of Dawson's published books and articles as well as unpublished or obscure letters, manuscripts, and writings in the archive containing the Christopher Dawson Collection at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. Other archives supply sources connected to various people and movements around Dawson, such as the Sociological Society and the Sword of the Spirit Movement. Chapter one studies various images of Dawson during the later interwar period until today—his reception history in journals, magazines, and newspapers, which will establish

⁴⁰ C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson, eds., *The Twentieth-Century Mind: History, Ideas, and Literature in Britain*, vol. 2: 1918-1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

⁴¹ Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity: 1920-1990*, 3rd ed. (1986; London: SCM, 1991).

⁴² Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 15.

Dawson's significance and introduce the themes dominating the rest of the thesis. More broadly, in the succeeding chapters, *anything* published during the interwar period in historiography, sociology, and the other fields in which Dawson engaged are potential sources. Navigation in this ocean of contemporary sources has proceeded in response to the questions each chapter seeks to answer, as well as by availability of sources, recommendation by other secondary works of scholarship, and even good luck in stumbling across unusual items. We examine, for example, various articles in *The Sociological Review*, many works of historiography (such as J. B. Bury's *Idea of Progress*, 1920), and other books and articles published by influential writers of the interwar period. Their writings were composed as secondary sources at the time they were written, but they have now become *contemporary* sources to the intellectual historian of today who looks back at the 1920s and 1930s. H. G. Wells, for example, attempted to survey world history in his *Outline of History* (1920), and his book became one of the most popular works of history in Britain during the early twentieth century. However, today its value is primarily as an example of those assumptions of 1920 (e.g., that world history is progressive) that Wells possessed and reaffirmed to a popular audience in the immediate post-Great War years. His book is just one example of the concerns of the post-war years (e.g., with nationalism), reeling as they were from the catastrophe of 1914-1918.

What questions did the Great War raise or intensify? First, there was the heightened interest in the *social* and the questions of social renewal and social progress. This new sensibility was seen in, for example, the demise of the Liberal party. During the Great War, the Liberal party leader H. H. Asquith (1852-1928) resigned and the subsequent coalition government fell in 1922. The dominance of the Liberal party was finished. The new Labour party formed its first government in 1924, an expression of an expanded franchise in 1918 and new working class social and economic concerns. (All British parties, however, attempted to portray themselves as parties of the "people".⁴³) This intensified post-war social awareness was seen within British sociological writing as well. In that milieu, Dawson began to publish in 1920 in *The Sociological Review*. If chapter one of this thesis reveals that Dawson was perceived as a kind of sociologist, chapter two then studies his actual connections to sociology during the 1920s, a decade when social questions (e.g., labor unrest) motivated much

⁴³ Duncan Tanner, "Electing the Governors/the Governance of the Elect," in *The British Isles 1901-1951*, ed. Keith Robbins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 48-52.

thought and publishing. What kinds of sociology were present in Britain during the 1920s, and what did Dawson draw from them in his historiography and social criticism? How did sociological ways of thinking fit into Dawson's work as an intellectual historian?

Sociology had long been connected to concerns for social progress, and both during and after the Great War the question of such progress rose to prominence in scholars and writers such as Joseph McCabe, L. T. Hobhouse, H. G. Wells, F. S. Marvin, and J. B. Bury. These individuals reaffirmed pre-war ideas of social progress, trying to shore-up the nineteenth-century optimism shaken by the war. Chapter three studies these writers and attempts to contextualize Dawson's book *Progress and Religion* (1929) in this debate during the 1920s.

Chapter four asks the question, "What was Dawson *doing* in his historiography in the context of British historical writing between the wars?" There were three central problems that his history of culture sought to remedy. (1) How to broaden traditional ecclesiastical history into a "religious history" that viewed religion as more than "institution" and as inevitably related to broader social developments? (2) After the Great War the question of nationalism forced a re-evaluation among some historians of the communal basis upon which historical narratives were constructed. If the *nation* had become a problematic unity upon which to base historical study, what were the alternatives? Dawson's answer: the history of culture. (3) Dawson's history of culture required a broader source base and a more sophisticated epistemology than the standard political, archival history of his day could offer; how did his "cultural critique" of empirical history assert a more nuanced and multi-faceted historical thinking? In this chapter, then, intellectual history engages with historiography.

With the rise of the social sciences and Dawson's interest in religious experience as a factor in human history, a unique idea of religion took shape at the heart of Dawson's history of culture. Chapter five attempts to contextualize Dawson's perspective on religion in his Gifford Lectures (1947-1949) by studying significant religious theorists he engaged with, such as James Frazer, Friedrich von Hügel, and Émile Durkheim. This chapter shows how Dawson's idea of religion as *religious sense inherently linked to culture* drew upon international roots to form the basis of the deeply social perspective on religion found in his historiography.

Chapter six links Dawson's idea of religion to his interpretation of interwar European politics. The Great War, he thought, created a psychological and spiritual

vacuum in which new creeds arose to give meaning and direction to human lives. These new secular creeds were the ideologies of Communism, Fascism, and Nazism. Even Britain was not immune from this danger, he thought. Dawson took an active role in the Sword of the Spirit movement during the Second World War to counteract the effects of totalitarian ideology on minds and souls. In the midst of that work, this final chapter suggests, he formulated a new and more ecumenical approach for Catholic engagement with politics.

This doctoral thesis demonstrates overall that the most useful way to write about Dawson is to penetrate beneath the various labels stuck on him, such as “sociologist” or “Catholic historian,” in order to recover the structures of his thinking beneath the major themes of his work: sociology, human progress, the history of culture, religion, and politics. Such a recovery will hopefully make available for today some of the patterns of his historical thinking which constitute his significant contribution to the discipline of history.

The thesis of this Ph.D. dissertation is that Dawson possessed a “cultural mind”. What was this “cultural mind”? Some writers suggested that Dawson was an “historian of ideas”.⁴⁴ While it is true that ideas and beliefs played a significant role in his historiography, and that he shared the typical interdisciplinarity of the intellectual historian, it is important to note that his main concern was not with ideas-in-themselves. Even in *Progress and Religion* (1929), the topic was not so much the idea of Progress as it was *culture* and cultural change, the factors present in cultural morphology and authentic human development. Dawson’s object of knowledge in that book, and in much of his work, was “culture,” which he described fundamentally as a common way of life of a particular people in a particular place. For him, “culture” was not simply the higher intellectual achievements of a people. It was also not simply the ways that people of the past represented themselves to themselves, or the meanings attached to objects or social mores, as it is for cultural historians of today. Dawson drew from the anthropology of the 1920s to view culture as broader than these descriptions: “The unity of a culture rests not only on a community of place—the common environment, a community of work—the common function, and the

⁴⁴ Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry* (1929; Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), xv. See also James Oliver, “Christopher Dawson: The Historian of Ideas,” 212, 213, 214, in Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*.

community of blood—the common race, it springs also, and above all, from a community of thought.”⁴⁵

Because culture embraced the whole of life, the intellectual and the material elements, Dawson had to study culture with the aid of many different disciplines. Thus the understanding of culture (and cultural change) was the goal that united the many disciplines of knowledge in Dawson’s mind. They cooperated in this common intellectual goal (of understanding), as in *Progress and Religion*, where each chapter of the first part of the book studied the history of a separate discipline (sociology, history, anthropology, and comparative religion). This attention to *disciplines of knowledge* partly explains the organization of my own thesis on the same basis, with each chapter on different kinds of intellectual developments during the interwar years. Thus I have utilized Dawson’s own method to study Dawson.

Study of culture became a way of thinking for Dawson. Thus, his characteristic pathways of thought towards intellectual understanding of culture can be referred to collectively as his “cultural mind”. His cultural mind was a way of attempting to “view the whole picture” of human life in the past. This attempt had to proceed, however, without ignoring the possible influence of any one factor in any particular case, and by carefully distinguishing between the disciplines and their limitations. Other elements of Dawson’s cultural mind will appear throughout the course of this thesis, such as his “cultural critique” of empirical history, his argument that religion can never really be separated from culture, and his attempt to understand the cultural roots of political developments. “It is not possible to discuss the modern situation either from the point of view of religion or politics without using the word ‘culture,’” he wrote in 1942.⁴⁶ The following chapters will excavate the elements of Dawson’s logic in order to demonstrate various facets of his cultural mind.

⁴⁵ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 66.

⁴⁶ Christopher Dawson, *The Judgment of the Nations* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1942), 93.

The Literary Reception of Christopher Dawson, 1928-2009

"We have undertaken to discourse here for a little on Great Men, their manner of appearance in our world's business, how they have shaped themselves in the world's history, what ideas men formed of them, what work they did; —on Heroes, namely, and on their reception and performance; what I call Hero-worship and the Heroic in human affairs." —Thomas Carlyle (1840)¹

Over 440 reviews of Christopher Dawson's books were published between 1928 and 1973. These appeared in more than 160 journals in Britain, the United States, Ireland, Canada, France, Germany, Spain, Czechoslovakia, and the Philippines. The range of the journals was broad, reflecting the diverse fields that Dawson wrote in: theology, philosophy, ancient and medieval and modern history, politics, international affairs, literature, religious history, archeology, education, Far Eastern studies, and sociology. Many of the journals were in the Catholic tradition. However, more than half of the journals that reviewed Dawson's books were not.²

¹ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841; London: Chapman & Hall, 1888), 1.

² Dawson wrote about two hundred articles and book reviews. Most of these are listed at the back of two biographies of Dawson by Scott and Birzer (see footnote 3). Dawson's books: *The Age of the Gods* (1928), *Progress and Religion* (1929), *Christianity and the New Age* (1931), *The Modern Dilemma* (1932), *The Making of Europe* (1932), *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (1933), *Medieval Religion and Other Essays* (1934), *Religion and the Modern State* (1935), *Beyond Politics* (1939), *The Judgment of the Nations* (1942), *Religion and Culture* (1948), *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (1950), *Understanding Europe* (1952), *Medieval Essays* (1954), *Dynamics of World History* (1957), *The Movement of World Revolution* (1959), *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture* (1960), *The Crisis of Western Education* (1961), *The Dividing of Christendom* (1965), *The Formation of Christendom* (1967), *The Gods of Revolution* (1972), *Religion and World History* (1975). There are two helpful lists of most of the reviews of Dawson's books. See: Anne Elizabeth Woolever, "Christopher Dawson: A Study in Anti-Democratic International Thought, 1920-1960" (Unpublished, University of Toronto, 1970); Claude Locas, "Christopher Dawson: A Bibliography," *Harvard Theological Review* LXVI (1973). Woolever included 308 reviews and Locas 412. However, Woolever listed twenty-five reviews not cited by the later work of Locas, which means that unfortunately Locas did not know of Woolever's work immediately preceding his own.

Other secondary literatures on Christopher Dawson include two biographies,³ two books on his thought as a whole,⁴ eight books that include chapters on Dawson,⁵ three collections of essays on Dawson,⁶ one whole journal issue,⁷ dozens of articles, and at least thirteen doctoral dissertations written in whole or in part on Dawson in Canada, Spain, the United States, and Britain. The year of completion for these dissertations is indicative of varied levels of interest in Dawson over the last six decades: 1949 (University of Notre Dame), 1954 (University of Edinburgh), 1962 (University of Louvain), 1965 (University of Florida), 1970 (University of Toronto and Université de Montréal), 1971 (St. John's University in New York), 1990 (Universidad de Navarra), 1992 (University of Manchester), 1996 (Northwestern University), 2000 (University of Notre Dame), 2003 (Universidad de Navarra), and 2007 (Durham University).⁸

³ Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson* (1984; New Brunswick: Transaction, 1992); Bradley J. Birzer, *Sanctifying the World: The Augustinian Life and Mind of Christopher Dawson* (Front Royal, Virginia: Christendom Press, 2007).

⁴ Daniel A. O'Connor, *The Relation between Religion and Culture According to Christopher Dawson (A Synthesis of Christopher Dawson's Writings)* (Montreal: Librairie Saint-Viateur, 1952); Jaime Antúnez Aldunate, *Filosofía de la Historia en Christopher Dawson* (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones Encuentro, 2006).

⁵ V. A. Demant, *Theology of Society: More Essays in Christian Polity* (London: Faber & Faber, 1947); Paul Costello, *World Historians and Their Goals: Twentieth-Century Answers to Modernism* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993); Ralph McInerny, ed., *Modernity and Religion* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); John J. Mulloy, *Christianity and the Challenge of History* (Front Royal, Virginia: Christendom, 1995); Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Luisa Passerini, *Europe in Love, Love in Europe: Imagination and Politics between the Wars* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Adam Schwartz, *The Third Spring: G. K. Chesterton, Graham Greene, Christopher Dawson, and David Jones* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005); James Lothian, *The Making and Unmaking of the English Catholic Intellectual Community, 1910-1950* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

⁶ Peter J. Cataldo, ed., *The Dynamic Character of Christian Culture: Essays on Dawsonian Themes* (New York: University Press of America, 1984); Carl Schmitt, ed., *Christianity and Western Civilization: Christopher Dawson's Insights* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993); Stratford Caldecott and John Morrill, eds., *Eternity in Time: Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997).

⁷ *Chesterton Review: Dawson Special Issue IX* (May 1983).

⁸ Bruno P. Schlesinger, "Christopher Dawson and the Modern Political Crisis" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1949); James Emerson Whitehurst, "The Christian View of History in Paul Tillich and Christopher Dawson" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1954); J. Edward Troy, "Religion and Culture: Christopher Dawson's Conception" (Ph.D. dissertation, Louvain, 1962); William Allen Speck, "The Role of the Christian Historian in the Twentieth Century as Seen in the Writings of Kenneth Scott Latourette, Christopher Dawson, and Herbert Butterfield" (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1965); Anne Elizabeth Woolever, "Christopher Dawson: A Study in Anti-Democratic International Thought, 1920-1960" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1970); Claude Locas, "Le Moyen-Age dans la pensée historique de Christopher Dawson" (Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Montréal, 1970); Charles Cushing, "Christopher Dawson's Cultural Morphology: The Process of Secularization in the West" (Ph.D. dissertation, St. John's University, 1971); Cesar Corcuera Garcia, "Religion and Culture in Christopher Dawson" (Ph.D. dissertation, Universidad de Navarra, 1990); Joan E. Keating, "Roman Catholics, Christian Democracy and the

Dawson attracted graduate student attention in several countries throughout the 1950s and 1960s. However, with Cushing's 1971 work, nothing more appeared for nearly twenty years. During the 1990s and 2000s, however, interest in Dawson returned in more places than in graduate schools: conferences on Dawson in 1995 (Westminster College, Oxford) and 2000 (Belmont Abbey College), and the republication of Dawson's writings in several languages, attest to renewed interest as well.⁹

What happened to Dawson in the 1970s and 1980s? Various explanations have been advanced: the shift in Catholic sensibilities after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the move away from broad historical study toward microhistory, the unpopularity (at least in Britain) of literary and artistic sources for historical writing, and the fact that Dawson never fit into an academic department and so could be written off as not belonging anywhere.¹⁰ From his vantage-point in 1969, Dawson's lifelong friend E. I. Watkin (1888-1981) noted that, "Dawson and his teachings have been discarded as outdated... [because some] who were foremost in his welcome and in the display of their regard for his work have turned away to a religious and cultural...avantguardism, without the least regard for the 'historical institutional'

British Labour Movement, 1910-1960" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Manchester, 1992); Adam Schwartz, "The Third Spring" (Ph.D. dissertation (published in 2005), Northwestern University, 1996); Jonathan James Reyes, "Christopher Dawson and the Renewal of Christian Culture" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2000); Jaime Antúnez Aldunate, "Christopher Dawson: The Horizon of Metahistory" (Ph.D. dissertation, Universidad de Navarra, 2003); Stephen G. Carter, "Historian of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Life and Ideas of Christopher Dawson" (Ph.D. dissertation, Durham University, 2006).

⁹ Recent republications of Dawson's works include: *Understanding Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009); *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009); *The Dividing of Christendom* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2009); *The Formation of Christendom* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2008); *Los Orígenes de Europa* (Madrid: Rialp, 2007); *The Movement Towards Christian Unity in the Nineteenth Century* (A Wimmer Memorial Lecture), ed. by Rene Kollar (Latrobe, Pennsylvania: Saint Vincent Archabbey, 2006); *Historia de la Cultura Cristiana*, ed. and compiled with a Prologue by Heberto Verduzco Hernández (Fondo de Cultura Económica, USA, 2006); *La Religión y el Origen de la Cultura Occidental* (Madrid: Encuentro Ediciones, 2005); *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity*, Introduction by Alexander Murray (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America, 2003); *Medieval Essays*, Introduction by John F. Boyle (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America, 2002); *Dynamics of World History*, ed. by John J. Murray with a new Introduction by Dermot Quinn (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002); *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, Foreword by Christina Scott and Introduction by Mary Douglas (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America, 2001); *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement* and "Newman's Place in History," Introduction by Peter Nockles (London: Saint Austin, 2001); *El Espíritu del Movimiento de Oxford* (Madrid: Rialp, 2000); *Christianity and European Culture: Selections from the Works of Christopher Dawson*, ed. with an Introduction by Gerald J. Russello (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America, 1998).

¹⁰ E. I. Watkin, "Tribute to Christopher Dawson," *The Tablet* 4 October 1969, 974; Allitt, *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome*; Caldecott and Morrill, eds., *Eternity in Time: Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History*, 2; Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 213.

element in religion and concerned only to establish an impossible order of universal material well-being. Such men are remote from everything for which Dawson stands.”¹¹ Another and more recent explanation comes from Dermot Quinn: “Perhaps his insistence that religion lies at the heart of culture seems reductive or confessional. Perhaps the anti-modernism seems precious or overdone. Perhaps his belief in Europe as ‘a spiritual unity [with a] common system of moral values’ is too Eurocentric for our Europhobic or multicultural day. More likely, though, is that fashion has passed him by because it never embraced him in the first place.”¹²

While fashion may have passed him by, there is renewed interest in Dawson today. In his Introduction to a collection of essays on Dawson, Cambridge historian John Morrill says that, “Dawson’s books have become *more* not less books that catch the mood of the present day. Unlike many scholars more fashionable at the time, his method and his palette have a strong contemporary feel to them.” This is because, Morrill writes, Christopher Dawson did not discount the role of ideas in shaping human culture. He advocated that the historian enter into the minds and sensibilities of actors in the past. And though his sensitive reading of literary texts did not utilize today’s critical techniques, “the sheer breadth, attentiveness and retentiveness of his reading means that his own writings achieve much the same effect unselfconsciously.”¹³

With Dawson’s reputation regaining some of its former visibility today, it is important to beware of viewing him a-historically. In order to historicize Dawson’s reputation, this chapter will study the array of secondary literatures on Dawson already mentioned and attempt to view the public images of him from the perspective of the interwar period (in Britain and the United States) in order to look forward in time to see how those images developed and whether new images arose in the subsequent decades. This approach will enable a more nuanced picture of Dawson’s reputation to emerge than is often presented in articles about the English historian today. The goal here is not to ask that the “true Dawson please stand up” or to put him in an identity category. Rather, this chapter will lay the foundation for a thesis that the entire dissertation will attempt to demonstrate: the most useful way to write about

¹¹ Watkin, “Tribute to Christopher Dawson,” 974.

¹² Dermot Quinn, “Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History,” in Caldecott and Morrill, eds., *Eternity in Time: Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History*, 70. Quinn quotes from Dawson’s *Understanding Europe* (New York: Image Books, 1960), 6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3, 4.

Dawson is not in terms of a particular identity but in terms of the *structure of his thinking*, the underlying logic by which he approached the past and the world around him. The discovery of that structure requires extensive historical investigation of the contexts around Dawson, including the ways he has been perceived over time—the subject of this chapter.

“archæological judge”

Dawson’s reputation entered the world in a significant way in 1928 through scholarly journals such as *Antiquity* and *Man*, and those of a more popular nature such as *The New Statesman* and *The Dublin Review*. That was the year his first book was published. The title was *The Age of the Gods: A Study in the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient East* (1928). His former tutor at Oxford, the classicist and political theorist Ernest Barker (1874-1960),¹⁴ recommended Dawson’s work to the publisher John Murray as worthy of serious consideration by scholars. Dawson outlined therein for the first time his understanding of culture—a main theme of all of his work—as a “common way of life.”¹⁵ And specialists in the field praised it and its author highly.

An anonymous reviewer in *The Dublin Review* cited Dawson’s restrained generalizations and refusal to push the evidence—often scarce enough for the writing of ancient history—further than it was worth. The reviewer called Dawson an “archæological judge,” contrasting him with those polemical “archæological advocates” like James Frazer (1854-1941) who supported a “pet thesis.”¹⁶ Another reviewer, praising his writing style as coming from the “heart,” wrote: “but nowhere do I find feeling perverting judgment, but rather stimulating it.”¹⁷ This image of Dawson as a careful “judge” of evidence also appeared in the review by the

¹⁴ Barker, Sir Ernest, political theorist, born at Heald Cottage, Woodley, Cheshire, to George Barker, a miner turned farm laborer, and his wife, Elizabeth Pollitt. Barker taught at Oxford; King’s College, London; and Cambridge; he was knighted in 1944 and elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1947. Besides Dawson, other Oxford students included the political scientist Harold Laski and the Christian sociologist Maurice Reckitt. See Julia Stapleton’s entry in the ODNB (accessed 28 February 2009). Barker greatly admired Dawson, speaking highly of him in his autobiography *Age and Youth* (1953). In fact, in Barker’s chapter recalling twenty-one years of Oxford pupils, he wrote at greater length about Dawson than any other pupil except Harold Laski.

¹⁵ Christopher Dawson, *The Age of the Gods: A Study in the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient East* (London: John Murray, 1928), xiii.

¹⁶ “The Age of the Gods,” review of *The Age of the Gods*, *The Dublin Review* CLXXXII (1928): 286, 287, 289.

¹⁷ Alfred Ernest Garvie, review of *Progress and Religion*, *Journal of Philosophical Studies* IV (1929): 408.

archeologist and anthropologist C. Daryll Forde (1902-1973), who later started the department of anthropology at University College, London, in 1945. While he thought that many points in Dawson's general thesis were open to criticism, "the author is to be congratulated on his skilful and conscientious use of the archaeological material. Artifacts characteristic of different periods and regions, from laurel leaf blades and shoe-last celts to bell beakers and types of fibulae, are carefully described as occasion arises.... The discussion of religious life and spiritual culture is allowed to develop from direct consideration of the archaeological evidence...."¹⁸ In a review of *The Making of Europe* (1932) for *The English Review*, the British historian, educator, and Liberal politician H. A. L. Fisher (1865-1940) wrote: "Mr. Dawson is a real historian. We have seldom read a book by a young writer so remarkable by reason of its combination of unusual learning with a firm grasp of general lines and principles, and a freshness and independence of judgment."¹⁹ The Catholic writer and translator E. I. Watkin (1888-1981) said in *The Commonweal* in 1933 that, "From a host of material, detail accumulated by an omnivorous reading and a marvelous memory, the facts are selected which reveal in a flash the essential nature of the object—a judgment or principle of wide scope and profound depth manifested, it may be, in a single illuminating detail."²⁰ One year later an unknown reviewer in *The Downside Review* praised Dawson's *Spirit of the Oxford Movement* (1933) as "judicial" and "a permanent enrichment of our knowledge." *The Spirit* was a book not merely "about the Oxford Movement: we are taken inside. Newman, Keble, Froude, William Palmer, live and talk again."²¹ Finally, in *The Spectator* the medieval historian David Knowles (1896-1974), appointed regius professor of modern history at Cambridge by Winston Churchill in 1954, praised the "learning and sane judgment" of Dawson's *Medieval Essays*, published that same year.²²

If Dawson was seen as an adept judge, weighing evidence or different perspectives carefully, a closely related image was of Dawson as "master" of vast learning and "faultless scholarship."²³ In the *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS below) Gervase

¹⁸ C. Daryll Forde, review of *The Age of the Gods*, *American Anthropologist* ns, XXXIV (1932).

¹⁹ H. A. L. Fisher, "European Unity," review of *The Making of Europe*, *English Review* LV (1932): 97-98.

²⁰ E. I. Watkin, "Christopher Dawson," *Commonweal* 27 October 1933, 609.

²¹ N. F. P., review of *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement*, *Downside Review* LII (1934): 196.

²² David Knowles, "An Historian of Culture," review of *Medieval Essays*, *Spectator*, 1 January 1954, 23.

²³ ———, "Christopher Dawson," *The Tablet*, 6 June 1970, 558.

Mathew (1905-1976), Dominican priest and Oxford University lecturer in Byzantine studies, viewed Dawson's *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (1950) as "a work of pure scholarship, marked by meticulous accuracy in detail."²⁴ "Erudite" and "erudition" were often used to describe the historian. That was true of reviewers concerning his first book in 1928, as well as for those writing retrospectively after his death about his work as a whole. In Jeffrey Hart's 1997 description, the *feeling* of learning in his writings was appealing: "We experience here the aesthetic appeal of sheer erudition, the sort of excitement that pervades Montaigne's *Essays*...."²⁵ If Dawson was a "judge" in the way he handled evidence, his aesthetic appeal was not unrelated to the *kinds* of evidence he used, as when Morrill describes him as an "archaeologist of text and image."²⁶

The image of Dawson as "judge" expanded by the 1940s when it became associated not primarily with his handling of evidence as with his "remarkable ability to go to the heart of an issue,"²⁷ his talent as an "historical critic,"²⁸ his diagnosis of contemporary problems, and his discernment of significant trends. The very title of his 1942 book, *The Judgment of the Nations*, reinforced this image. In a review of *Judgment*, he was praised for his "vast learning and acute judgment, his powers both of analysis and synthesis" that have "made him an historian and a philosopher of history of outstanding distinction."²⁹ In a like manner, philosopher and rationalist C. E. M. Joad (1891-1953) wrote for *The New Statesman and Nation* about the 1942 book: "Thus it is the distinguishing contention of Mr. Dawson's penetrating and carefully worded diagnosis that the structure of democracy has already been undermined from within."³⁰ From Ireland the book was hailed for its "cheerful

²⁴ Gervase Mathew, "Religion in History," review of *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 April 1950, Religious Book Section, vii.

²⁵ V. Gordon Childe, review of *The Age of the Gods*, *Antiquity* II (1928): 485; David Knowles, "Christopher Dawson," *Proceedings of the British Academy* LVII (1971): 450; Jeffrey Hart, "Christopher Dawson and the History We Are Not Told," *Modern Age* XXXIX (1997): 211.

²⁶ Caldecott and Morrill, eds., *Eternity in Time: Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History*, 2.

²⁷ Harry Elmer Barnes, review of *Dynamics of World History*, *American Historical Review* LXIII (1957): 78.

²⁸ Stephen J. Tonsor, "History and the God of the Second Chance," review of *Dynamics of World History*, *Modern Age* II (1958): 200.

²⁹ John Murray, "Mr. Dawson and the World Crisis," review of *The Judgment of the Nations*, *The Month* CLXXIX (1943): 138.

³⁰ C. E. M. Joad, "Forward to Christendom," review of *The Judgment of the Nations*, *New Statesman and Nation*, 28 August 1943, 142.

forecast of so sagacious a political thinker as Mr. Dawson.”³¹ For economic historian and Christian socialist R. H. Tawney (1880-1962), the book was a praiseworthy “diagnosis of the crisis of our age.”³²

“intellectual ascetic”

Curiously, while Dawson’s reputation for “erudition” and “integrity as a scholar”³³ has proved durable, the image of him as a *disciplined thinker*, a restrained writer, which flourished during his lifetime, has not persisted. Already in 1928: “Many highly controversial issues are touched upon,” wrote a reviewer of *The Age of the Gods* (1928) for *The New Statesman*, but “never is an hypothesis represented as a fact.”³⁴ Reviewing *The Making of Europe* (1932), the agnostic writer Aldous Huxley in *The Spectator* wrote: “For the most part, he [Dawson] generalizes with a sobriety and a caution worthy of the highest praise. We meet, in his pages, with none of those “deep” metaphysical hypotheses, in terms of which some modern German historians have so excitingly and so unjustifiably interpreted the course of past events. Mr. Dawson is an intellectual ascetic who conscientiously refrains from indulging in such delicious but dangerous extravagances.”³⁵ The Scottish poetess and literary scholar Rachel Annand Taylor (1876-1960) wrote that Dawson’s attitude to life was that of a “scholar and Contemplative,” and a review of *The Judgment of the Nations* (1942) admired his “power of calm and profound analysis.”³⁶ Daniel O’Connor, who wrote a summary book on Dawson’s thought, cited a certain detachment as a characteristic of Dawson, who “is interested in discovering the causes or principles underlying certain trends in society rather than in seeking an immediate solution for some practical social problem.”³⁷ This reputation for detachment and discipline lasted into the late years of Dawson’s life. In 1957, the British medievalist historian Geoffrey Barraclough (1908-1984) contrasted Dawson with world historian Arnold Toynbee

³¹ D. O’K., review of *The Judgment of the Nations*, *Studies* XXXII (1943): 286. This reviewer was probably Rev. Denis O’Keeffe, Professor of Ethics and Politics, University College, Dublin.

³² R. H. Tawney, “Tract for the Times,” review of *The Judgment of the Nations*, *Manchester Guardian*, 24 March 1943, 3.

³³ Fernando Cervantes, “Progress and Tradition: Christopher Dawson and Contemporary Thought,” *Logos* II (1999): 106.

³⁴ “Swords and Ploughshares,” review of *The Age of the Gods*, *New Statesman* XXI (1928): 166.

³⁵ Aldous Huxley, “Light on the Dark Ages,” review of *The Making of Europe*, *Spectator*, 20 August 1932, 235.

³⁶ Rachel Annand Taylor, review of *Progress and Religion*, *Sociological Review* XXII (1930): 52; Murray, “Mr. Dawson and the World Crisis,” 144.

³⁷ O’Connor, *The Relation between Religion and Culture According to Christopher Dawson* (*A Synthesis of Christopher Dawson’s Writings*), xiv.

(1889-1975) in *The Manchester Guardian*: “What stands out is the consistency of Mr. Dawson’s thought; recalling Toynbee in many ways, his mind is more disciplined and profound.”³⁸ Two years later, a reviewer of *The Movement of World Revolution* (1959) for the *TLS* wrote: “But even at his boldest, he [Dawson] is always cool, deeply thoughtful, and persuasive.”³⁹

Dawson’s second book, *Progress and Religion* (1929), studied the factors present in human progress throughout the centuries. The topic was a live one during the 1920s: classical scholar J. B. Bury (1861-1927) published his *Idea of Progress* in 1920, and *The Decline of the West*, by the German historian and philosopher Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), appeared in English translation in 1926-1929. Dawson’s book attracted considerable attention. The novelist and feminist Vera Brittain (1893-1970) reviewed it favorably in 1929 for *Time and Tide*. She said that Dawson’s explanation of why moral and spiritual progress had not kept pace with great scientific and material development was “worthy of serious consideration by all who care for the future of European culture.” Whether or not one agreed with Dawson’s explanation of present ills, “his conclusions are difficult to refute, for the achievements of material progress, which are our only argument against them, seem already to have carried us nearer to the abyss of disaster than to the mountain of salvation.”⁴⁰ But Rachel Annand Taylor hit a key note when she reviewed *Progress and Religion* for *The Sociological Review*: “From a scholar so profound in his learning and so animated in his intelligence as Mr. Dawson,” she wrote, “we expect and receive no unremarkable book.” She continued: “The author’s mind is so flexible, his mood so tolerant, his urbanity so patient, his vision of the slow processes of time so far-gazing and so acute, that any reader must be impressed, if not persuaded.”⁴¹

In this way, Dawson the “intellectual ascetic” became associated with the image of “his mood so tolerant.” H. A. L. Fisher wrote of *The Making of Europe* (1932) that, “What is also much to be praised is that although Mr. Dawson is a Roman Catholic, who quite rightly makes no concealment of his religious standpoint, he advances nothing from which even the most protestant historian who knows his facts, need

³⁸ Geoffrey Barraclough, “History at a Turn?,” review of *Dynamics of World History*, *Manchester Guardian*, 4 October 1957, 11.

³⁹ Christopher Montague Woodhouse, “Europe in the World of the Future,” review of *The Movement of World Revolution*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 December 1959, 719.

⁴⁰ Vera Brittain, “Modern Europe Adrift,” review of *Progress and Religion*, *Time and Tide* X (1929): 592, 593.

⁴¹ Taylor: 52.

recoil.”⁴² Ten years later, a flurry of attention swirled around *The Judgment of the Nations* (1942), a book studying the religious and sociological foundations of Christian disunity as an important, long-term historical background to the war between nations then raging. Religion scholar Carl E. Purinton (1900-1982) of Beloit College (in Wisconsin) praised Dawson’s words—though with hesitation over the Catholic Church’s attitude in general—about the need for Christian unity: “They seem to suggest a new tolerance and spirit of cooperativeness....”⁴³ Ernest Barker was more robust in *The Spectator*. Praising *Judgment*, he wrote: “The reviewer once taught Mr. Dawson, over thirty years ago, at Oxford. He learned from his pupil, even when he was his teacher. He has learned from him steadily since. He has learned most of all from this book.” He commented that there is a “fine and generous liberalism in all that Mr. Dawson writes.”⁴⁴ From the United States, the image of tolerance was hailed as well. In a 1957 review of *Dynamics of World History* (1956) for *The American Historical Review*, the Columbia University historian and leader of the American progressive intelligentsia, Harry Elmer Barnes (1889-1968), wrote that, “This is a book which no thoughtful historian can safely ignore,” and that, “Those who differ with him about basic ideology will profit by seeking to observe or emulate the same degree of mellowness, urbanity, and tolerance which permeates Dawson’s writings.”⁴⁵

This reputation for tolerance expanded in other ways. Dawson was praised for his avoidance of apologetics. The glowing review of *The Age of the Gods* (1928) in *The Dublin Review* remarked that, “Mr. Dawson draws no apologetic conclusions from the facts he narrates,” and *The New Statesman* said of the same book that, “Many highly controversial issues are touched upon, but always without dogmatism....”⁴⁶ E. I. Watkin wrote of Dawson’s *Age of the Gods* (1928) and *The Making of Europe* (1932) that, “Without apologetic forcing, the facts as he sets them out interpret themselves in a religious sense.”⁴⁷ Two decades latter an anonymous reviewer in *Time* magazine wrote: “Although a Roman Catholic himself, Dawson does not take the tack of the conventional Catholic medieval apologist, who regards the period as a happy but

⁴² Fisher, “European Unity,” 98.

⁴³ Carl E. Purinton, review of *The Judgment of the Nations*, *Journal of Bible and Religion* XI (1943): 232.

⁴⁴ Ernest Barker, “Catholic Sociology,” review of *The Judgment of the Nations*, *Spectator*, 12 February 1943, 152.

⁴⁵ Barnes: 78, 79.

⁴⁶ “The Age of the Gods,” 294; “Swords and Ploughshares,” 166.

⁴⁷ Watkin, “Christopher Dawson,” 608.

vanished Golden Age when there were no Protestants around.”⁴⁸ However, some disagreed with this image. Writing in the *Journal of Modern History* about *Dynamics of World History* (1956), world historian William H. McNeill (1917-) accused Dawson of sometimes tending to “wear his faith on his sleeve. This aspect of his mind is clearest in the four essays grouped in this volume under the head ‘Christianity and the Meaning of History,’ all of which are militantly Roman Catholic.”⁴⁹ The American Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) may have agreed with McNeill because in his review of *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture* (1960) for *The New York Times* he stated that, “A recent book entitled, ‘The Meaning and Matter of History,’ by the distinguished English Jesuit, Father Martin D’Arcy, proves that a good Catholic can view the mystery and meaning of history from a wider perspective and with less restrictive dogmatism than Mr. Dawson.”⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the American historian of France and of ideas, Crane Brinton (1898-1968), had written in *Speculum* in 1958 concerning *Dynamics of World History* (1956) that of all the “generalizers” of history, Dawson “is surely the one most likely to be accepted—or not wholly rejected—by historians of academic professional training, tastes and standards.” Brinton continued: “He is in no sense a wild man, a prophet of doom. ...His Catholicism, it need hardly be pointed out, is no form of fundamentalism....”⁵¹ The image of “a mood so tolerant” indeed persisted. Reflecting on Dawson’s posthumously published *The Dividing of Christendom* (1971) and *The Gods of Revolution* (1972), the British Catholic historian E. E. Y. Hales wrote that, “In all this Dawson is quite unconcerned to make a ‘Catholic case’.”⁵² And in the year 2000: “While Dawson certainly brought a Catholic’s eye to the study of history, historiography, and civilization, his understanding of the complexities of culture moved beyond the traditional denominational and polemical controversies associated with apologetic history.”⁵³

⁴⁸ “The Case for Christendom,” review of *Medieval Essays*, *Time* 15 February 1954, 60.

⁴⁹ William H. McNeill, review of *Dynamics of World History*, *Journal of Modern History* XXIX (1957): 257.

⁵⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, “What’s a Mote to One is a Beam to Another,” review of *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture*, *New York Times*, 13 March 1960, BR 18. Martin D’Arcy (1888-1976) was a Jesuit theologian.

⁵¹ Crane Brinton, review of *Dynamics of World History*, *Speculum* XXXIII (1958): 272.

⁵² E. E. Y. Hales, “The Dawson Legacy,” *Tablet*, 1 April 1972, 299.

⁵³ Charles R. Strauch, “Through a Glass Darkly: Reflections on Christopher Dawson,” review of *Eternity in Time: Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History*, *University Bookman* XL (2000): 8.

“literary artist”

Throughout his life the image of Dawson as a “literary artist”⁵⁴ remained strong. Of *Progress and Religion* (1929), the Congregational minister and theologian Alfred E. Garvie (1861-1945) wrote for the *Journal of Philosophical Studies*: “The book is well written; one feels that it has been written *con amore*, that the author’s heart as well as his head is in the undertaking....”⁵⁵ Looking back retrospectively from 1970 over Dawson’s lifework, *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* stated that, “To the ranks of distinguished historians who are also men of letters [such as George Macaulay Trevelyan and Arnold Joseph Toynbee, also discussed here] we must add the name of Christopher Dawson....”⁵⁶ More recently, in the pages of the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Edward Yarnold of Campion Hall, Oxford, reviewed a book of essays on Dawson: “This collection is to be welcomed as a step towards the rehabilitation of the reputation of an erudite and prophetic scholar and an exquisite stylist.”⁵⁷

His style was often commented on for its clarity. For C. Daryll Forde, Dawson offered a “clear and well balanced account of the prehistoric cultures,” and in a 1932 newspaper notice, “Mr. Dawson needs little introduction to the Catholic public. He is one of our clearest and most profound thinkers today....”⁵⁸ In a critical review of Dawson’s *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (1950), the regius professor of modern history, Hugh Trevor-Roper (1914-2003), nevertheless praised Dawson’s description of the early medieval period: “How well, how clearly he describes it! How rich and various is his scholarship, how happily presented! It is a stimulating experience to read these dozen chapters, covering almost as many centuries, full of learning, and yet clarifying, not compressing, that crowded history of vast migration, obscure events, and fragmentary evidence.”⁵⁹ The medieval historian C. R. Cheney (1906-1987) also praised this work of “so learned and lively” a scholar (in *The*

⁵⁴ Watkin, “Christopher Dawson,” 609. An exception: in 1952 Noel Annan reviewed Dawson’s *Understanding Europe* (1950) and declared it “insufficient” partly because of a “failure in style,” giving the impression of being “dictated or hurriedly set down.” Noel Annan, “Modern Dilemmas,” review of *Understanding Europe*, *Manchester Guardian*, 3 June 1952, 4.

⁵⁵ Garvie: 408.

⁵⁶ George Sampson, *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

⁵⁷ Edward Yarnold, review of *Eternity in Time: Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History*, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* L (1999): 415.

⁵⁸ Forde: 340; “Mr Christopher Dawson,” *Catholic Times* [London] 27 April 1934.

⁵⁹ H. R. Trevor-Roper, review of *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, *New Statesman and Nation*, 11 March 1950, 276.

Manchester Guardian), but did not share Trevor-Roper's sense of clarity. "Unfortunately Mr. Dawson never says what he means by 'culture'.... The very first paragraph implies an equation of 'Christian culture' and 'Western culture' which begs the question; yet we read that 'leadership of Western culture had passed to Islamic Spain' by the tenth century. There is a 'pattern of mediaeval culture,' but also a constant antithesis in the early Middle Ages of 'war and peace cultures.'"⁶⁰ This complaint about Dawson was rare. The respected medievalist of Johns Hopkins University, Sidney Painter (1902-1960), wrote in *Speculum* concerning *Medieval Essays* (1954) that, "Mr. Dawson...has a striking flare for expressing clearly complex abstract ideas."⁶¹ Concerning the same volume, David Knowles said: "Nothing in these essays is more important than the clear picture he gives of the Moslem civilization of the ninth and tenth centuries...."⁶² *Time* magazine felt the same way: "He writes with the smooth mixture of clarity, scholarship and happy metaphor that characterizes good British historians...."⁶³ Geoffrey Bruun (1898-1988), the Canadian-born historian of modern Europe who taught much in the United States, revealing a familiarity with many of Dawson's books, wrote for *The New York Times* that, "If one had to sum up his writing in two words, the words would be clarity and charity."⁶⁴ In his obituary, Douglas Woodruff (1897-1978), journalist and editor of *The Tablet* 1936-1967, wrote: "It was in proportion to their own reading and scholarship that men appreciated the quality of Dawson's work—his immensely wide reading, the beautiful ordering of his thought, and the clarity of his writing."⁶⁵ For some, Dawson's style was also "precise." Harry Elmer Barnes indicated that Dawson could "state his points and conclusions with great cogency and brilliant precision." The Canadian scholar of the French Revolution, M. J. Sydenham, wrote of Dawson's posthumous *The Gods of Revolution* (1972): "It is also a book singularly well written, in which striking similes are magnificently matched with precise expression."⁶⁶

⁶⁰ C. R. Cheney, "Western Culture," review of *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, *Manchester Guardian* 10 February 1950, 4.

⁶¹ Sidney Painter, review of *Medieval Essays*, *Speculum* XXIX (1954): 798.

⁶² Knowles, "An Historian of Culture," 23.

⁶³ "The Case for Christendom," 60.

⁶⁴ Geoffrey Bruun, "Why Civilizations Rise and Decline," review of *Dynamics of World History*, *New York Times*, 25 January 1959, BR 26.

⁶⁵ Douglas Woodruff, "Christopher Dawson," *Tablet* 6 June 1970, 558.

⁶⁶ Barnes: 78; M. J. Sydenham, review of *The Gods of Revolution*, *Canadian Historical Review* LIV (1973): 435.

“Catholic publicist”

During the 1940s and 1950s a transition occurred in Dawson’s reputation as a wider and wider audience viewed his work in Britain and the United States. He had published *The Judgment of the Nations* to wide acclaim and helped lead the Sword of the Spirit movement during the Second World War; delivered the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh 1947-1949; contributed to a BBC series in 1948 in company with historian G. M. Trevelyan (1876-1962), philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), and literary critic and biographer Lord David Cecil (1902-1986) on “The Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians;” published an anthology of his writings in 1956 called *Dynamics of World History* that attracted a lot of attention; and left Britain to teach at Harvard University in 1958. Already by 1943 one reads in the *TLS* about Dawson’s “well-known view of world history.”⁶⁷ Another *TLS* reviewer wrote in 1950 that, “Since the publication of *The Making of Europe* in 1932 Mr. Christopher Dawson has been recognized as one of the most significant of living English historians. The steady and consistent development of historiography in England increasingly throws into relief the importance of his particular contribution.”⁶⁸ Also in that year appeared a front-page (two pages in length) review of Dawson’s *Understanding Europe* in the *TLS* by a merchant for the international firm Ralli Brothers, P. J. A. Calvocoressi (1874-1965). The review was critical, but the author nevertheless pointed out that in the book Dawson argued “with all the persuasiveness and scholarship which are now expected of him.”⁶⁹ The British medievalist Frederick Maurice Powicke (1879-1963) wrote in 1951 for the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*: “Mr. Dawson, as we all know, writes with insight and distinction....”⁷⁰ Bruun noted in 1959 for *The New York Times* that, “Mr. Dawson’s numerous books and articles, and his duties as editor of *The Dublin Review*, have made his name well known to American students of society.”⁷¹ For the *British Journal of Educational Studies*, author N. R. Tempest wrote in 1962: “The appearance of a book by

⁶⁷ Dermot Michael Macgregor Morrah, “Return to United Christendom?,” review of *The Judgment of the Nations*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 March 1943, 110.

⁶⁸ Mathew, “Religion in History,” Religious Book Section vii.

⁶⁹ Peter John Ambrose Calvocoressi, review of *Understanding Europe*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 November 1952, 717.

⁷⁰ F. M. Powicke, review of *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* II (1951): 110.

⁷¹ Bruun, “Why Civilizations Rise and Decline,” BR 26.

Christopher Dawson, now Professor of Roman Catholic Studies at Harvard, is always an event....”⁷²

The 1940s and 1950s were more than a period of transition in the breadth of Dawson’s audience. New images arose, such as Dawson as “Catholic publicist” or “apologist,” despite the contemporary and contrasting image of Dawson *avoiding* apologetics as already described. In 1952 appeared in *The Manchester Guardian* the phrase “tract for the times,” which was used disparagingly of Dawson’s *Understanding Europe* by Noel Annan (1916-2000), the historian and Second World War intelligence officer.⁷³ And Hugh Trevor-Roper, reviewing *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (1950) for *The New Statesman and Nation*, wrote about the conclusion he saw Dawson coming to in the book: that Christianity alone was a formative, dynamic religion. Though one could easily argue that Trevor-Roper had misread Dawson, “This is Mr. Dawson’s conclusion,” he wrote. “It seems inconceivable that he should draw it, that so learned a scholar should appear, in this one respect, so parochial.”⁷⁴ The prominent British Marxist historian of the seventeenth century, Christopher Hill (1912-2003), wrote a review of *Dynamics* for *The Spectator* in 1957. Dawson’s book bored him, he said. Hill wrote: “The late Mr. Dawson was not a great historian: he was a diligent Roman Catholic publicist with a considerable and genuine interest in history.” Dawson replied one week later in a Letter to the Editor entitled—in the spirit of G. K. Chesterton—“Manalive”: “Sir,—my attention has just been drawn to the article in your current issue by Mr. Christopher Hill on ‘The Church, Marx and History’ [the review of *Dynamics*], in which he states that ‘the late Mr. Dawson was not a great historian.’ I do not wish to assert that I am ‘great,’ but I do most emphatically deny that I am ‘late,’...”! Dawson could not resist a little revenge, as he continued: “and I feel doubtful whether a writer who is unable to discover the truth in a contemporary matter of fact which is easily ascertainable is competent to survey the vast field which he has embraced in his article.” Hill responded in a Letter to the Editor a few weeks later apologizing for any embarrassment caused; he said that he assumed the author was dead because the book

⁷² N. R. Tempest, review of *The Crisis of Western Education*, *British Journal of Educational Studies* X (1962): 206.

⁷³ Annan, “Modern Dilemmas,” 4.

⁷⁴ Trevor-Roper, 276.

in question seemed like a definitive collection that was put together by someone else. That ended the debate.⁷⁵

The image of Dawson as “publicist” had arisen earlier, during the interwar years, but then it was used in a positive or neutral way. For example, author E. M. F. Tomlin wrote in his review of *Religion and the Modern State* (1935) that, “A new book by the author of *Progress and Religion* will be of interest not merely to Catholics, but also to the considerable body of non-Catholics who, since that masterpiece first appeared, have come to the conclusion that in Mr. Christopher Dawson we have a historian of the first rank as well as a lucid and convincing publicist. (I can only hope Mr. Dawson will not resent the title of publicist, which I should also ascribe to such ‘clerics’ as Renan, Sorel, and Newman himself.)”⁷⁶ This positive spin was implied eight years later in R. H. Tawney’s review in *The Manchester Guardian* of *The Judgment of the Nations* (1942) called “Tract for the Times.”⁷⁷ This phrase was used neutrally by the American metahistorian Hayden White (1928-) to distinguish Dawson’s “tracts of the times” (such as *The Modern Dilemma*, *Beyond Politics*, and *Understanding Europe*) from his “historical essays” and “theoretical works” (such as *The Age of the Gods* and *The Making of Europe*).⁷⁸ And in a 1950 review for the *Journal of Modern History*, the scholar of Victorian religion and literature, Hoxie N. Fairchild (1894-1973), wrote of *Religion and Culture* (1948) that, “Dawson’s basic motive is not so much historical as apologetic and propagandist (in the original nonpejorative sense of that term). He would draw from the past a lesson for a present....”⁷⁹

A variation on this positive image of Dawson the publicist was Dawson the “Catholic historian.” Dawson’s Catholicism was widely known and often remarked on from the earliest of reviews. That is not surprising, since he published twenty of his twenty-five books with the Catholic publishing company Sheed & Ward; wrote articles for many Catholic journals such as *The Tablet*, *The Commonweal*, and *The Month*; edited the major Catholic journal *The Dublin Review* from 1940-1944; served as Vice-President of the Catholic proto-ecumenical movement Sword of the Spirit

⁷⁵ Christopher Hill, “The Church, Marx and History,” review of *Dynamics of World History*, *Spectator*, 20 September 1957, 370; Christopher Dawson, “Manalive,” *Spectator*, 27 September 1957, 398; Christopher Hill, *Spectator*, 11 October 1957, 479.

⁷⁶ E. W. F. Tomlin, review of *Religion and the Modern State*, *Criterion* XV (1935): 133.

⁷⁷ Tawney, “Tract for the Times,” 3.

⁷⁸ Hayden V. White, “Religion, Culture and Western Civilization in Christopher Dawson’s Idea of History,” *English Miscellany* IX (1958): 250, 251.

⁷⁹ Hoxie N. Fairchild, review of *Religion and Culture*, *Journal of Modern History* XXII (1950): 267.

during the Second World War; and taught at Harvard University as the Charles Chauncey Stillman Professor of Roman Catholic Studies from 1958-1962. However, the first instance that this author could find of a reference to Dawson specifically as a “Catholic historian”—the first coupling of those two words in this way, only occurred in 1957. For the *TLS* the classical scholar Peter Morris Green reviewed *Dynamics of World History* and stated that, “It is true that Mr. Dawson is a professed Roman Catholic historian, *pro Deo et Ecclesia*.... But he manages to square his religious views, in the most ingenious way, with a staunch advocacy of anthropology and sociology as ancillary techniques in historical method.”⁸⁰ Another reference occurred in 1966. The Polish historian Oscar Halecki (1891-1973) found refuge in the United States during the Second World War, helping to found the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America in 1942. Dawson wrote the Preface for his 1950 book *The Limits and Divisions of European History*. In his review of *The Dividing of Christendom*, Halecki hailed Dawson as a “great Catholic historian.”⁸¹ Finally, in 1973 he was referred to as a “Catholic historian” in the *Harvard Theological Review*.⁸² But during the 1970s and 1980s this image of Dawson was largely dormant, as was his reputation in general. (Significantly, the biography of him published in 1984 was simply called *A Historian and His World*⁸³—it did not call attention to his religion.) However, with the rediscovery of Dawson during the 1990s and 2000s this image of Dawson as a “Catholic historian” re-emerged and spread widely. For example, the book *Eternity in Time: Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History* (1997) is built around this image of him, and in a review of that volume for *The University Bookman* Dawson is referred to as the “English Catholic historian Christopher Dawson.”⁸⁴ The 2007 book *Sanctifying the World: The Augustinian Life and Mind of Christopher Dawson*⁸⁵ is also constructed around this image. And Dawson as “Catholic historian” can easily be found on many Internet sites (as of July 2009).

⁸⁰ Peter Morris Green, “God and History,” review of *The Dynamics of World History*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 December 1957, 781.

⁸¹ Oscar Halecki, review of *The Dividing of Christendom*, *Catholic Historical Review* LII (1966): 120.

⁸² Daniel Callahan et al., “Christopher Dawson: 12 October 1889-25 May 1970,” *Harvard Theological Review* LXVI (1973): 167.

⁸³ Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson 1889-1970* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1984).

⁸⁴ Caldecott and Morrill, eds., *Eternity in Time: Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History*; Strauch, “Through a Glass Darkly: Reflections on Christopher Dawson,” 8.

⁸⁵ Birzer, *Sanctifying the World: The Augustinian Life and Mind of Christopher Dawson*.

“prophetic sociologist”

Philosopher Russell Hittinger wrote an essay in 1991 called “Christopher Dawson: A View from the Social Sciences” in which he wrote:

I use the term social scientist in connection with Dawson chiefly in the classical-modern sense of the term—derived from Weber and Durkheim, who worked on the border of such disciplines as history, cultural anthropology, and philosophy. The great pioneers of modern social science were fascinated by the problem of religion and modernity, which was a central issue not only for Weber and Durkheim but also for Freud. Dawson also stood in a slightly older tradition, which I shall call “prophetic sociology”, of the sort practiced by Alexis de Tocqueville and perhaps also, in his own way, by Henry Adams. ...By prophetic sociology, I mean an investigation of social data that leads not so much to scientific generalizations as to a moral or religious vision. Here I am only paraphrasing Dawson’s own characterization of Tocqueville, with whom he closely identified.⁸⁶

The “prophetic sociologist” investigates social data in the interest “not so much” of scientific generalization (although this is not ignored) but of a “moral or religious vision.” Dawson was very much seen in this way through a number of different images from the earliest years: as a “sociologist,” a “scientist,” a “prophet,” a “Catholic sociologist.”

Indeed, Dawson’s first entry into publishing and the academic world was through sociology during the 1920s, as discussed in chapter two. His work was reviewed in *The Sociological Review* and in the *American Sociological Review*. The history of the human sciences was a central theme of *Progress and Religion* (1929) and he included a chapter on science in *The Modern Dilemma* (1932). For his *Age of the Gods* (1928) Dawson was praised by a reviewer in the *Criterion* for having done a “great service to the sciences of anthropology and history.”⁸⁷ By 1934, then, the image of him as a sociologist had clearly arisen. In that year he wrote an essay called “Sociology as a Science” that was included in a book with the title *Science Today: The Scientific Outlook on World Problems Explained by Leading Exponents of Modern Scientific Thought*. Therein he was referred to as a “Lecturer in Cultural Evolution, Exeter University College.”⁸⁸ In the Irish journal *Studies* a 1934 review of *Medieval Religion* praised his sociological mind as found in two essays in particular: “Origins of the

⁸⁶ Russell Hittinger, “Christopher Dawson: A View from the Social Sciences,” in *The Catholic Writer*, ed. Ralph McInerny (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 33, 34. For Dawson’s reference to Tocqueville, see Christopher Dawson, “The Problem of Metahistory,” in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1957; Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002).

⁸⁷ H. J. Massingham, review of *The Age of the Gods*, *Criterion* VIII (1928): 151. *Criterion* was edited by T. S. Eliot.

⁸⁸ Christopher Dawson, “Sociology as a Science,” in *Science Today: The Scientific Outlook on World Problems Explained by Leading Exponents of Modern Scientific Thought*, ed. J. G. Crowther and Sir J. Arthur Thomson (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1934). He is referred to as a “cultural historian” in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; see entry by William Kingston, ODNB.

Romantic Tradition” and a study of William Langland. “These two last essays are admirable specimens of Mr. Dawson’s fine sense of literature and of the social influences which have conditioned its development.”⁸⁹ If there he had connected sociology and literature, two years later he was hailed for connecting sociology and politics in a review of *Religion and the Modern State* (1935). “It is fortunate for English-speaking Catholicism that Mr. Dawson should apply his knowledge as an historian and sociologist to the contemporary problem.”⁹⁰ In the United States, the essays in Dawson’s *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (1933) were said to be “concerned with the history and the social function of religion. In other words, they are at once historical and sociological.”⁹¹ And a certain Dino Ferrari in *The New York Times* highlighted the element of “sociological evidence” present in that same book.⁹² Of *The Judgment of the Nations* (1942), C. E. M. Joad remarked on Dawson’s connection of sociology and religion. He noted in *The New Statesman and Nation* that, “Mr. Dawson derives the splits and schism which have rent Christendom from social conditions and conflicts. He brings great historical knowledge to the elucidation of this thesis—it has a curiously Marxist flavour, by the way—and is remarkably successful in establishing correlations between historical circumstances and religious divisions.”⁹³ In his piece on Dawson’s work as a whole, David Knowles referred in 1971 to him as a “sociologist in the era before computers and opinion-polls rather than a ‘straight’ historian, though he could grasp a series of events as well as the influence of groups and trends.”⁹⁴ After the republication of some of Dawson’s writings around the turn of the millennium, this view has persisted. The Orthodox priest and editor of *Touchstone*, Patrick Henry Reardon, writes that, “Dawson’s philosophy of history was solidly empirical in approach, and the present reviewer is especially struck by his sane appreciation of the discipline of sociology as the correct basis for historical study.”⁹⁵

⁸⁹ A. G., review of *Medieval Religion*, *Studies* XXIII (1934): 530.

⁹⁰ T. Charles-Edwards, “Religion and the Modern State,” review of *Religion and the Modern State*, *Downside Review* LIV (1936): 77.

⁹¹ Robert E. Park, review of *Enquiries into Religion and Culture*, *American Journal of Sociology* XLI (1935): 109.

⁹² Dino Ferrari, “Religion and Culture in This Disordered World,” review of *Enquiries into Religion and Culture*, *New York Times*, 4 February 1934, BR 2.

⁹³ Joad, “Forward to Christendom,” 142.

⁹⁴ Knowles, “Christopher Dawson,” 450.

⁹⁵ Patrick Henry Reardon, “Dawson Revisited,” review of *Christianity and European Culture*, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement and Newman's Place in History*, *Dynamics of World History*, *Touchstone*, April 2002, 45.

In fact, the title of a review of *The Judgment of the Nations* in *The Spectator* was “Catholic Sociology,”⁹⁶ and of that volume Carl E. Purinton wrote: “This book by the Roman Catholic sociologist, Christopher Dawson, restates the neo-Thomist analysis of the plight of our western world, an analysis already familiar from other writings of the same author, Jacques Maritain, and others.”⁹⁷ M. M. Tew wrote for the Jesuit publication *The Month* that—with *Religion and Culture* (1948)—Dawson “has squarely entered a field of controversy which sociologists have tended to regard as their own. For this reason his authority as an historian is important, for sociologists are a little apt to pay lip-service to the need for historical perspective, but to conduct their own research without its aid.”⁹⁸ James C. Freeman reviewed the same book and noted that, “Among the Christian sociologists who write from the Catholic point of view is Christopher Dawson... Moving easily but with erudition over large areas of sociology, anthropology, and comparative religion, Mr. Dawson introduces his main thesis....”⁹⁹

Others used the word “prophet” as a symbol of Dawson’s view of the social order linked to a moral or religious vision, as when the “Christian sociologist” and theologian V. A. Demant (1893-1983) likened Dawson to Jeremiah, or when Hayden White noted that a certain argument of Dawson’s was “in the tradition of Amos and Hosea.”¹⁰⁰ E. E. Y. Hales wrote that, “Christopher Dawson was a historian. But he was also a prophet—or, if you prefer, a meta-historian with a message.”¹⁰¹ In his 1970 obituary for Dawson, David Knowles wrote that “to those who were young, or not so old, in the late 1920s and the 1930s he will always remain as a master, indeed as a prophet. His vast learning, his faultless scholarship, were at the service of a mind that did not fear to take the broadest view of history and religion, yet which never turned history into meta-history, and never imposed thought-patterns upon the story of the living past.”¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Barker, “Catholic Sociology,” 152.

⁹⁷ Purinton: 232. Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) was a French philosopher and political thinker.

⁹⁸ M. M. Tew, “Religion and Culture,” review of *Religion and Culture*, *Month* I (1949): 133.

⁹⁹ James C. Freeman, review of *Religion and Culture*, *Journal of Bible and Religion* XVIII (1950): 185.

¹⁰⁰ Demant, *Theology of Society: More Essays in Christian Polity*, 187; Hayden White, “Religion, Culture and Western Civilization in Christopher Dawson’s Idea of History,” *English Miscellany* IX (1958): 265, n34.

¹⁰¹ Hales, “The Dawson Legacy,” 299.

¹⁰² Knowles, “Christopher Dawson,” 558.

Despite Knowles's comment to the contrary, "metahistorian" was indeed an image associated with Dawson. What is metahistory? Concerning the role of the historian, Dawson noted in an essay on metahistory that the mastery of the techniques of historical research will "not produce great history, any more than mastery of metrical technique will produce great poetry. For this something more is necessary—intuitive understanding, creative imagination, and finally a universal vision transcending the relative limitations of the particular field of historical study."¹⁰³ For Dawson, at least, metahistory interpreted the facts of history in the light of creative understanding; it concerned itself with "the nature of history, the meaning of history and the cause and significance of historical change."¹⁰⁴ This essay appeared in Dawson's *Dynamics of World History* (1956), and a new image of him was born shortly afterward. Geoffrey Bruun in *The New York Times* noted that, "Dawson is concerned with metahistory on a grand scale.... [But he] is not a system-maker. He knows that at the present stage of historical knowledge all systems are over-simplifications."¹⁰⁵ Russell Hittinger wrote a significant piece on Dawson as metahistorian: "Dawson's interpretive skills and metahistorical orientation were his strongest suit, and indeed these were what his students and readers found most stimulating."¹⁰⁶ Paul Costello, in his valuable study *World Historians and Their Goals: Twentieth-Century Answers to Modernism* (1993), incorporates Dawson's definition of metahistory into the foundation of his concept of "world history" and includes a chapter on Dawson along with studies of H. G. Wells, Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Pitirim Sorokin, Lewis Mumford, and William H. McNeill.¹⁰⁷

Dawson the "metahistorian" was fundamentally an "interpreter" of the past, someone concerned with *meaning* in history, and this image of an "interpreter" had even deeper roots in Dawson's reputation. Ferrari in *The New York Times* wrote about

¹⁰³ Dawson, "The Problem of Metahistory," 309-310.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 303.

¹⁰⁵ Bruun, "Why Civilizations Rise and Decline," BR 26.

¹⁰⁶ Russell Hittinger, "The Metahistorical Vision of Christopher Dawson," in *The Dynamic Character of Christian Culture*, ed. Peter J. Cataldo (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 1, 8. Hittinger is correct when he writes of the impact of Dawson on students. For example, see Mark Hutchinson's (Dean, School of Graduate Studies, Southern Cross College) interview with Patrick O'Farrell, historian of Australia. As a student in New Zealand, O'Farrell studied under John J. Saunders, who had been a student of Dawson. In this interview, O'Farrell states: "I like things intellectually well-structured, which was one of the reasons why Christopher Dawson and his pupil, J. J. Saunders, had a great appeal. I liked very much the generalities of the structures that Dawson could perceive in history. I thought that made sense of it in a way which the party-politics under Gladstone didn't make sense of anything." Mark Hutchinson, "Patrick O'Farrell: 1933-2003," <http://www.patrickofarrell.com/comment.html>, (accessed 31 July 2007).

¹⁰⁷ Costello, *World Historians and Their Goals: Twentieth-Century Answers to Modernism*.

Enquiries into Religion and Culture (1933) that, “In short, he interprets the modern scene in light of a transcendental faith, broad historical knowledge and realistic (Paretan) sociological evidence, and evaluates his evidence in the scale of Catholic philosophy.”¹⁰⁸ Concerning *Judgment of the Nations* (1942), Barker wrote for *The Spectator*: “Mr. Christopher Dawson occupies today the sort of position which was once held by Lord Acton and Baron von Hügel. He is the interpreter to England of a Catholic historical philosophy and a Catholic social and political theory—an interpreter whose pen is nerved by the bitter urgency of these later times. He is at his best (and it is a fine best) when he is writing in the style of Ernst Troeltsch on ‘the social teaching of the Christian Churches’; but he adds to the wide and Olympian views of Troeltsch a prophetic and practical purpose, such as inspires the movement of the ‘Sword of the Spirit’ in which he is one of the leaders.”¹⁰⁹ For Demant in 1947: “There is no one in England who combines a real feeling for the meaning of contemporary issues with the historical and cultural insight of the scholar to such a pre-eminent degree as Christopher Dawson.”¹¹⁰ In 1954 David Charles Douglas (1898-1982), historian of the Normans, reviewed *Medieval Essays* for the *TLS*. He especially praised his essays on the Christian East and on the Muslim influence in medieval Europe for the “interpretative skill which vitalizes the evidence adduced.”¹¹¹ In E. I. Watkin’s obituary: “First and last he is an interpreter: interpreter of human culture in general but most particularly of Christian culture.”¹¹² And recently, Dawson’s daughter and biographer wrote that, “Dawson was a historian who saw deeper and further than many of his contemporaries because he had the gift of interpreting the present in the light of the events of the past.”¹¹³

Linking the past to the present, making it “relevant,” asking questions that arise in the present and directing them toward the past—this was a common image of Dawson. He himself wrote in 1933 that, “All genuine thought is rooted in personal needs, and my own thought since the war, and indeed for some years previously, is

¹⁰⁸ Ferrari, “Religion and Culture in This Disordered World,” BR 2.

¹⁰⁹ Barker, “Catholic Sociology,” 152. Lord Acton (1834-1902), regius professor of modern history at Cambridge; Baron von Hügel (1852-1925), philosopher and theologian; Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), German Protestant theologian and historian.

¹¹⁰ Demant, *Theology of Society: More Essays in Christian Polity*, 185-186.

¹¹¹ David Charles Douglas, “Christian Culture,” review of *Medieval Essays*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 January 1954, 39.

¹¹² Watkin, “Tribute to Christopher Dawson,” 974.

¹¹³ Christina Scott, “The Meaning of the Millennium: The Ideas of Christopher Dawson,” *Logos* II (1999): 78.

due to the need that so many of us feel to-day for social readjustment and for the recovery of a vital contact between the spiritual life of the individual and the social and economic organization of modern culture.”¹¹⁴ Guthrie remarked of *Religion and Culture* (1948) that, “The core of this work is a marshalling of evidence from the history of religions in order to throw light on the problems of today”—namely, the contemporary divorce between religion and culture.¹¹⁵ Looking at the same volume, Freeman preferred the earlier *Progress and Religion* (1929) because it “analyzed a problem more immediate to us all.... Mr. Dawson’s writings, however, are unified and consistent in point of view, and it is the breadth and perspective shown in such works as this last one that give profundity to his analysis of the specific problems of our age of transition and anxiety.”¹¹⁶ The classical scholar Arthur Hilary Armstrong (1909-1997) from University College, Cardiff, noted Dawson’s ability to “throw light on the complexities of our present civilisation and its predicament, which it has always been one of Mr. Dawson’s main concerns to do.”¹¹⁷ John J. Mulloy (1916-1995), Catholic educator and editor of Dawson’s *Dynamics of World History* (1957), wrote in his introduction to Dawson’s only excursion into autobiography:

Dawson’s basic principle of historical interpretation has been that what is past is not simply dead, but survives in the present and has a vital relationship to it. Here also the circumstances of his early childhood led him to a realization of this vital element in historical thinking, for in Hay Castle where he was born all the elders of the present generation had their living counterparts in the generation which immediately preceded them. He remarks on the significance of this for his understanding of the meaning of Time “as a dimension in which past and present co-exist and of the human mind as a Titanic power that brings the two together, transcending the process of generation and corruption.”¹¹⁸

The human mind as a Titanic power—that was how some people viewed Dawson’s own mind and the “intellectual architecture” he tried to build and stand on in order to view the past more clearly.

“intellectual architect”

¹¹⁴ Christopher Dawson, *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1933), v.

¹¹⁵ Keith Guthrie, “The Modern Dilemma,” review of *Religion and Culture*, *Spectator*, 10 December 1948, 784.

¹¹⁶ Freeman: 186.

¹¹⁷ A. H. Armstrong, review of *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, *Hibbert Journal* XLVIII (1950): 404.

¹¹⁸ Christopher Dawson, *Tradition and Inheritance* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Wanderer, nd), 4. This essay was reproduced in full in Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 221-239. Mulloy’s quotation appears on p. 225.

The image of Dawson as “intellectual architect” only appeared in 2007,¹¹⁹ but it captures the essences of a number of significant earlier images long associated with Dawson and related to him as “interpreter.” For some reviewers, he uniquely possessed “a wider vision”¹²⁰ and was a man seeking the “whole pattern of the past.”¹²¹ This perception arose from the very beginning. V. Gordon Childe (1892-1957), widely regarded as the leading European scholar on ancient history of his time,¹²² wrote a humble and favorable review of Dawson’s *Age of the Gods* (1928). Childe studied at Oxford (just after Dawson’s time there) under the distinguished archaeologist and historian John Linton Myres (1869-1954) and was competent in almost every European language. For the newly founded archeology quarterly *Antiquity*, he wrote the following about Dawson’s book:

The compilation of an archaeological monograph or handbook involves such an intensive absorption in technical literature and such a concentration on abstractions, that fruitful or illuminating interpretation is virtually impossible; for that demands not only a concrete imagination but also an acquaintance with the conclusions of cognate disciplines that are likewise buried in technical works. As the author of a dull compilation and specialist essays, I have always hoped that someone with more ample leisure and a wider vision would reassemble the dry bones served up by myself and others and, with the aid of kindred sciences, reanimate the frame of prehistoric humanity. The book before us is the most comprehensive, most erudite, most sane and consequently most successful effort in that direction that I have come across. Mr. Dawson has made a heroic endeavour ‘to study man’s past, not as an inorganic mass of isolated events, but as the manifestation of the growth and mutual interaction of living cultural wholes’, and to present the result as a picture that the layman may read without a glossary.

...The total result of this wide survey is a more comprehensive and reliable sketch...than has been heretofore been offered by any individual author.¹²³

Here was an image of Dawson “reassembling” historical data, the “mass of isolated events,” with the help of “kindred sciences,” to sketch a picture—or construct an “architecture”—of living “cultural wholes.” Not only did Dawson’s ability to synthesize the work of other scholars into a coherent study impress Childe (and others), but so too did his utilization of different perspectives afforded by separate spheres of knowledge, distinct disciplines of specialized research. Watkin wrote that in *Progress and Religion* (1929) he “embraces the most varied fields of scholarship—archaeology, anthropology, history in the strict sense, sociology, literature, art,

¹¹⁹ Karl Schmude, "Christopher Dawson—An Intellectual Architect," *Campion's Brag* VI (Spring 2007): 2. This is the newsletter for a new Catholic liberal arts college in Australia available at www.campion.edu.au/foundation/documents/39334_Brochure_Autumn07_lowres.pdf (accessed 3 July 2009).

¹²⁰ Childe: 485.

¹²¹ Brinton: 273.

¹²² Peter Gathercole, entry in ODNB (accessed 28 February 2009).

¹²³ Childe: 485, 486.

comparative religion, metaphysics, and theology....”¹²⁴ Brinton gave a name to this quality of Dawson’s mind: “He is, as a historian, no monist but a pluralist. He is familiar with anthropology, sociology, psychology, and the rest of the train of the behavioral sciences, but again he manages to preserve his historian’s virtue in the face of all this.”¹²⁵ *Dawson the pluralist*—another image. Haydn White used a variation of it: “It is Dawson’s merit to have stressed the necessity of viewing historical change pluralistically, and in so far as he actually does so his work is of the highest quality, doing justice to the true multiplicity of historical forms of thought and action.”¹²⁶ Others may not have used the word “pluralist” but they evoked that image in other words. Harry Elmer Barnes wrote of *Dynamics of World History* in the *American Historical Review* that it “reveals Dawson as a writer so well versed in anthropology, sociology, psychology, and the basic ideas which have dominated historical perspectives over the ages that he almost measures up to the pattern of the ideal historian recommended by James Harvey Robinson in his *The New History*.”¹²⁷ Armstrong reviewed *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (1950): it was a book which he thought to be a “detailed illustration of the thesis, expounded by Mr. Dawson’s first volume of Gifford Lectures [*Religion and Culture*], of the pre-eminent part played by the influence of religion in cultural development. In his survey of the period from the Barbarian invasions to the fourteenth century [in *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*] he certainly shows convincingly (the more convincingly because he pays attention to other important factors) the decisive part played by the Christian religion....”¹²⁸ “Other important factors”—again, Dawson the pluralist, trying not to leave out any factors of historical reality. Knowles wrote that Dawson was an “historian of culture with his eyes ever surveying the whole historical process, marking the great changes, and interpreting their significance.”¹²⁹ Sydenham appreciated Dawson’s “remarkably perceptive appreciation of the interaction of social change with political and religious convictions.”¹³⁰ In 2002, Reardon recommended the republished *Dynamics of World History* “without the slightest reservation” to

¹²⁴ Watkin, “Christopher Dawson,” 608.

¹²⁵ Brinton: 273.

¹²⁶ White, “Religion, Culture and Western Civilization in Christopher Dawson’s Idea of History,” 253.

¹²⁷ Barnes: 77. James Harvey Robinson (1863–1936) was an American historian who published his *The New History* in 1912 calling to extend history far beyond its traditional political subjects.

¹²⁸ Armstrong: 404.

¹²⁹ Knowles, “An Historian of Culture,” 23.

¹³⁰ Sydenham: 435.

“historians, philosophers, artists, theologians, and lovers of letters” because “all of these aspects of culture receive the attention of Christopher Dawson...”¹³¹

Why did Dawson pursue *all the factors*, the whole picture? What really was he after? For some, Dawson displayed a “mastery of thought” as an “historian of ideas” as he sought to understand past culture and their formative ideas and beliefs. As early as 1929, Garvie, in his review of *Progress and Religion*, wrote: “It is seldom I have read a book which I have found of so great interest and importance, for the wide range of knowledge is accompanied by a mastery of thought.”¹³² But it was years later when the opening chapter of *Religion and Culture* was seen to be “the most valuable part of the book for the historian of ideas”¹³³ or when the journalist and economist Barbara Ward (1914-1981) wrote for *The New York Times* that, “For years he [Dawson] has been one of the most profound historians of the ideas, aspirations and cultural movements that went to the making of Western society in its European cradle.”¹³⁴ Knowles wrote for the *Proceedings of the British Academy* in 1971 that, “He was indeed a historian of ideas, not of events.... His greatest strength appeared in his deployment of pregnant ideas and a traditional outlook with a persuasiveness and a depth of psychological penetration that made his work very influential and such as still awakens and holds the interest of thoughtful students. In his field he was the most distinguished Catholic thinker of this century.”¹³⁵ One year later Hales also wrote: “As a historian Dawson’s scholarship, and especially the range of his reading and his eye for the formative idea, always carry conviction. His concern is to show the attitudes, moods, beliefs and passions that controlled men’s lives and shaped events. But he has his feet well planted on the ground.” In *The Dividing of Christendom* (1971) and *The Gods of Revolution* (1972), Hales highlighted what he thought Dawson was really after: “He is simply the historian, determined to disclose the guiding ideas that have in fact dominated men’s minds and to put them in their proper environmental setting.”¹³⁶

More recently, as the “history of ideas” has become more confident as a discipline, so “historian of ideas” has become an important retrospective image cast upon Dawson. The scholar and life-long admirer of his work, James Oliver, wrote

¹³¹ Reardon, “Dawson Revisited,” 45.

¹³² Garvie: 407.

¹³³ Fairchild: 267.

¹³⁴ Barbara Ward, review of *The Movement of World Revolution*, *New York Times*, 29 March 1959, BR 7.

¹³⁵ Knowles, “Christopher Dawson,” 450.

¹³⁶ Hales, “The Dawson Legacy,” 299.

“Christopher Dawson: An Appreciation” included in *The Gods of Revolution* (1972). Oliver said that his works on culture, from *The Making of Europe* (1932) to *The Formation of Christendom* (1967), “drew their importance from his unique gift as a historian of ideas, first revealed in *Progress and Religion* [1929].”¹³⁷ In another piece, “Christopher Dawson: The Historian of Ideas,” included in the 1984 and 1992 editions of Scott’s biography, Oliver wrote that anyone who encounters Dawson’s work for the first time “has to adjust to its scope, to realise that he is foremost a historian of ideas.” The history of ideas, Oliver asserted, draws from many disciplines—sociology, anthropology, literature, art, comparative religion, philosophy, and theology. “It demands wide reading, deep learning, discernment and judgement.” That Dawson had such qualities “was hardly disputed by the critics....”¹³⁸ James Ambrose Raftis (1922-2008), a professor at the University of Toronto and the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, published an essay called “The Development of Christopher Dawson’s Thought” in 1983. He wrote thus: “Dawson was concerned with some of the most sophisticated problems of the intellectual life of the twentieth century.... When the time comes to write the intellectual history of the twentieth century, Christopher Dawson will undoubtedly be duly acknowledged.”¹³⁹ Finally, Morrill wrote in 1997 that, “Dawson was first and foremost a man for whom the heroic enterprise of recreating the mental world of actors in the past required a willingness to engage not only with the written texts but with art and artefacts.”¹⁴⁰

For all of these commentators, Dawson the “historian of ideas,” the “pluralist,” was trying to recreate “the mental world of actors in the past” by building up an intellectual architecture encompassing the many thrusts and counter-thrusts of various perspectives, an architecture like a multi-faceted gothic cathedral, supported by the flying buttresses of many disciplines. Others criticized this constructive attempt as problematic and inadequate. As early as 1929, the British “rural writer” and amateur archeologist, H. J. Massingham (1888-1952), detected a “queer dualism” between “anthropological modernism” and “traditionalism” in *Progress and Religion*.¹⁴¹ In a

¹³⁷ Christopher Dawson, *The Gods of Revolution* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1972), xv.

¹³⁸ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 212, 213.

¹³⁹ James Ambrose Raftis, “The Development of Christopher Dawson’s Thought,” *Chesterton Review* IX (1983): 115.

¹⁴⁰ Caldecott and Morrill, eds., *Eternity in Time: Christopher Dawson and the Catholic Idea of History*, 2.

¹⁴¹ H. J. Massingham, review of *Progress and Religion*, *Criterion* IX (1929): 146, 149.

review of *Dynamics of World History* for the *Journal of Modern History*, the world historian William H. McNeill wrote:

The really major question these essays raise, at least in my opinion, is one of intellectual jurisdiction. Dawson the sociologist and Dawson the Catholic often seem to speak a rather different language. As a sociologist, for example, he can contemplate either the "complete secularization of Western culture" (p. 100) or "the coming of a new religion" or "the revival of the old religion with which the culture was formerly associated" (p. 101) as apparently equally possible courses for the future. Yet earlier in the same essay, he affirms: "It is impossible to understand religion simply as a function of society, or to identify the social and religious categories.... The other aspects of religion—the trans-social ones, if I may use the expression, have also to be taken account of, though here the sociologist is incompetent to make final conclusions. Here the sociologist is dependent on the data furnished by theology or the science of religion, which alone can attempt to define the nature and scope of religion comprehensively" (p. 92). Under these circumstances, it seems that Dawson the Catholic, armed with "the science of religion," should have no difficulty in coming to the rescue of Dawson the sociologist and deciding which of his three choices for the future is the only possible one.

The difficulty seems to arise from the fact that sociology, like theology, claims a certain universality. Each is characterized by a readiness to explain anything and everything human. Can a man keep a foot in both camps, as Dawson does, without intellectual inconsistency? And, if so, on what principle does one draw the line, beyond which the one or the other discipline may not exercise jurisdiction. This Dawson never makes clear.¹⁴²

For McNeill, the "queer dualism" in Dawson's mind between sociology and theology may have been irreconcilable. The whole question of *boundaries* between disciplines and the principles by which one knows those boundaries was lacking in Dawson. Concerning *Dynamics*, Barnes gently indicated the same problem of "intellectual jurisdiction" in *The American Historical Review*: "Perfectionists will find some things to complain about. They may hold that, although Dawson assumes to adopt a sociological interpretation of history, theology takes over in the ultimate showdown...."¹⁴³ Peter Morris Green also noted a kind of dualism in Dawson, as well as taking McNeill's line of questioning about "intellectual jurisdiction":

One can speak without inconsistency of the two halves of Mr. Dawson's mind, since he so frequently declares that the two aspects of human culture they represent must, somehow, be combined, yet seldom achieves a wholly satisfactory synthesis in the event. This gives a subtly schizoid quality to some of his best work. "What we need," he writes, "is a scientific sociology which...must recognize at once the determination of natural conditions and the freedom of spiritual forces, and must show how the social process embraces both these factors in a vital union like that of the human organism." Is such an ideal...possible even on its own terms? It seems doubtful.....

Nevertheless, Green went on to elicit a more positive image:

But perhaps his most stimulating quality is that of ranging freely through a whole complex of allied disciplines, correlating them into a living whole: he is never for a moment unaware of the immense, unquenchable variety of human life and human experience.

...That is the really essential quality of Mr. Dawson's work: an opening up of frontiers, a broad integration of isolated disciplines in the crucible of a humane and passionate mind, an

¹⁴² McNeill: 257-258; Green, "God and History," 781-82.

¹⁴³ Barnes: 78.

unfreezing of cold abstractions into the human realities: love, enthusiasm, faith, anger, death. It is no mean achievement; and we can all, scholar and amateurs, sceptics and believers, derive great benefit from it.¹⁴⁴

Were there actually two halves to Dawson's mind? Did the "intellectual architecture" he tried to build really contain the dichotomies and inconsistencies identified by McNeill and Green? Did he violate "intellectual jurisdiction" in his attempt to utilize different disciplines, mixing up the tools spread before him and occasionally using the wrong one? These critics have raised immensely helpful questions for consideration. But Dawson was not a systematic thinker or a philosopher; he never worked arguments or methodologies out to their logical completion. So too this doctoral thesis is a practice of history, not of philosophy, and will make little attempt to answer these questions theoretically.

However, some of Dawson's ways of historical thinking have already begun to appear in the very images of him presented in this chapter. In the eyes of some, he was a careful "archaeological judge" of the evidence, an "intellectual ascetic" who refrained from indulgent generalizations or extravagant claims. For some he possessed detachment, refusing to "make the Catholic case." Others condemned him for doing just that. He was praised for writing with "clarity and charity." As a "prophetic sociologist" he tried to view social and historical facts not simply *as* facts, but as positioned in meaningful relations to each other and to a "universal vision" that sprang from asking real questions in the present. The image of Dawson as an "intellectual architect" suggests that he read many secondary studies on a topic and worked up broad, synthetic views. This construction involved working "on the border of disciplines" with "kindred sciences," trying not to exclude any of the factors. His thought was viewed as pluralistic, interdisciplinary, correlating distinct bodies of knowledge into a living whole. Finally, as McNeill noted, Dawson *thought through* the human person, meaning that a certain conception of the person as both body and mind/spirit—a dualist anthropology—lay at the heart of his thought.

This thesis will not attempt philosophical analysis or defense of any of these ways of thought. But through an ambitious empirical and historical itinerary through Dawson's "life and times," his ways of thinking will emerge more clearly as they are viewed *in action*, allowing for general conclusions to be made concerning his contribution to history. Through historical "pointillism," through study of many of the

¹⁴⁴ Green, "God and History," 782.

small and distinct colors making up the world Dawson inhabited and thought about, the structure of his thinking will hopefully appear when standing back and viewing the many details as a whole.

This chapter has attempted to historicize (and relativize) the whole question of Dawson's identity by viewing a series of interlocking, contradicting, and evolving images of him. This has demonstrated that the procedure of this thesis is sound: to understand Dawson it is necessary not to stop at those surface images, but to attempt to look beneath the surface of his many "identities," at the *ways of thought* which informed his historiography and interaction with the real world of interwar Britain—those intellectual environments and developments in sociology, the idea of "progress," historiography, religion, and politics that Dawson reacted to.

To that real world this thesis now turns.

CHAPTER TWO

SOCIOLOGY

"The problem of sociology is probably the most vital scientific issue of our time, for if we admit the impossibility of creating a scientific sociology we are confessing the failure of science to comprehend society and human culture."—Christopher Dawson (1934)¹

Many reviewers commented on Dawson's grasp of the importance of sociology when thinking about history, religion, and politics. Some, such as William H. McNeill and Peter Morris Green, criticized his attempt to correlate sociology and theology. Nevertheless, the question of "intellectual jurisdiction," of the limits and boundaries of disciplines in relation to each other, was vitally important to him—as when he wrote to his friend Alexander Farquharson in 1933: "I wonder if my paper for the soc. congress [International Congress of Sociology in Geneva] seemed to you to help to establish the limits of the soc. [sociological] and theological provinces[?]"² When surveying his work as a whole, and his early involvement in the Sociological Society during the 1920s, there is no question about the importance of sociology for Dawson and his continued activity in this field into the early 1930s. Not only did he write extensively on the subject (in *The Sociological Review* and in *Progress and Religion*) and lecture on the importance of connecting sound sociological thinking to politics,³ but he also lectured on "The Place of Sociology in Catholic Thought"⁴ in 1933 and

¹ Christopher Dawson, "Sociology as a Science," in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1956; Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002), 14. This essay was first published as a book chapter: Christopher Dawson, "Sociology as a Science," in *Science Today: The Scientific Outlook on World Problems Explained by Leading Exponents of Modern Scientific Thought*, ed. J. G. Crowther and Sir J. Arthur Thomson (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1934).

² Dawson to Farquharson, 28 October 1933, KA-AF, folder "Christopher Dawson Letters."

³ Christopher Dawson, "Conservatism," STA, box 3, folder 38 "Conservatism."

⁴ No copy of this lecture seems to exist, but Dawson sent a synopsis to his friend Alexander Farquharson which this author discovered in Farquharson's papers. "Synopsis of Paper to be read by Mr. Christopher Dawson at the Linnean Society's Hall (Burlington House, Piccadilly) on June 19th at 8 p.m. on 'The Place of Sociology in Catholic Thought'." See KA-AF, folder "Dawson, C. Lectures and Letters" as well as Farquharson's letter to Dawson, 16 June 1933, KA-AF, folder "Christopher Dawson Letters." The Linnean Society of London was founded in 1788 for the cultivation of natural history. According to its website, today it is the "world's oldest active biological society." It embraces all aspects of the biological sciences. See: www.linnean.org/ (accessed 7 July 2009). No record has been found that Dawson actually gave this lecture to the Society, so perhaps its hall was being used by another group which invited Dawson to speak.

published a book chapter called "Sociology as a Science" in 1934.⁵ He saw himself as competent in the field, as when he wrote to Farquharson while applying for the Chair of the Philosophy and History of Religion at Leeds University in 1933: "Personally I think it is very desirable that they should have someone who is prepared to treat the subject on sociological lines & not in a purely abstract theological or philosophical way, & from this point of view I think I should do as well as any one, considering the comparatively small number of workers in the field."⁶ He did not obtain the position. This was possibly because of his Catholicism.⁷ Nevertheless, all of this activity raises questions: how did he come to be involved in British sociology? What varieties of sociology were available to him? What did it mean for him to *think sociologically*?

Christopher Dawson and British Sociology

In 1920 Dawson and his wife Valery were living at Tisbury in Wiltshire in an old rented cottage without electricity or running water when he published his first article for *The Sociological Review* called "The Passing of Industrialism." This optimistic article was about decisive changes in social attitudes after the Great War away from the materialistic ideals of nineteenth-century exploitative industrialism.⁸ The article demonstrated Dawson's early interest in social questions and the ways contemporary problems (such as high inflation in 1919, working class unrest⁹) provoked him to ask questions about past and present. Whether through personal interest, or by chance encounters with others, Dawson somehow became involved in the Sociological Society and entered into the world of British sociology just after the close of the Great War.

That world was a unique place compared to sociology in other countries. Outside of Britain, sociology and social theory came to great prominence in the early years of the twentieth century. There were important German thinkers such as Karl Marx (1818-1883), Max Weber (1864-1920), Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936), and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie that the latter two helped found in 1909. In France, sociology had a long and respected history back to the eighteenth century and was

⁵ Dawson, "Sociology as a Science."

⁶ Dawson to Farquharson, 27 January 1933, KA-AF, folder "Christopher Dawson Letters."

⁷ Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson* (1984; New Brunswick: Transaction, 1992), 110. The Chair went to E. O. James (1888-1972), an anthropologist in the field of comparative religion.

⁸ Christopher Dawson, "The Passing of Industrialism," *Sociological Review* XII (1920): 6.

⁹ A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 140-141.

dominated later by Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904), respected journals, and the Institut International de Sociologie (founded 1893). In the United States, Albion Small (1854-1926) was an “awesomely successful academic entrepreneur” who started the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1895, founded the school of sociology at the University of Chicago around the turn of the century, and presided over the American Sociological Society from its founding in 1905.¹⁰

In Britain, the situation was somewhat different. Reba Soffer, for example, argues that during the fifty years between the popularity of the philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) in the 1890s until the 1950s, sociology played no significant role in British academic life. Soffer writes that, “In Britain, aside from the London School of Economics where L. T. Hobhouse and his successor Morris Ginsberg taught an evolutionary sociology, there were no academic courses in sociology, no synthetic theorists, no genuinely professional associations, no commanding journal of sociological work of opinion, and no sociologists.”¹¹ Why was this so? Because “sociologists had neither institutional protection nor, more seriously, viable ideas. ...All the factions, including Hobhouse and Geddes, continued the nineteenth-century sociologists’ faith in the inevitability of progressive reform.”¹²

Soffer’s argument about the disciplinary failure of sociology in Britain has been questioned, however.¹³ If academic sociology was weak in Britain during the early twentieth century, sociological speculation and debate could be found in many regions of national life from economics and biology to philosophy and ethics and even history. If “sociologists” were scarce, “social thinkers” were ubiquitous and the public of Victorian England had a great interest in social science.¹⁴ This interest clearly continued beyond the Victorians, despite the lack of a single and coherent discipline of sociology. Choosing a random issue of *The Times Literary Supplement* from 1920 and turning to the book-publisher advertisements,¹⁵ one notices the following volumes

¹⁰ Reba N. Soffer, “Why do Disciplines Fail? The Strange Case of British Sociology,” *English Historical Review* XCVII (1982): 768, 776.

¹¹ Ibid.: 768. Morris Ginsberg (1889-1970), Martin White Professor of Sociology in the University of London, London School of Economics, 1929-1954. Selected publications: *The Psychology of Society* (1921), *Studies in Sociology* (1932), *Moral Progress* (1944), *The Idea of Progress: A Revaluation* (1953), and *Nationalism: A Re-appraisal* (1961). See next page for information on Hobhouse.

¹² Ibid.: 774, 781.

¹³ Lawrence Goldman, “Foundations of British Sociology 1880-1930: Contexts and Biographies,” *Sociological Review* LV (2007).

¹⁴ ———, “Victorian Social Science: From Singular to Plural,” in *The Organisation of Knowledge in Victorian Britain*, ed. Martin Daunton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 87-88.

¹⁵ *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 February 1920, 91.

under the heading “sociology”: (1) M. B. Hammond, *British Labor Conditions and Legislation during the War* (New York: Oxford University Press); (2) G. K. Chesterton, *The Superstition of Divorce* (London: Chatto & Windus); (3) Mrs. Gell, *Womanhood at the Crossroads* (S.P.C.K.); (4) Herbert Ellsworth Cory, *The Intellectuals and the Wage Workers: A Study in Educational Psychoanalysis* (New York: The Sunwise Turn); (5) *First Annual Report of the Industrial Welfare Society for the Year ended June 30, 1919* (Westminster: Sanctuary House); and (6) Ernest Parley, *Life in a Madhouse* (Independent Labour Party). “Sociology,” then, was a particular way of thinking or imagining that sought to understand human beings in the context of their social, economic, and moral environments. It was a wide social phenomenon, not an academic one, concerned with practical problems and social renewal.¹⁶

Broadly speaking, three main groups worked to spread sociological thinking in early twentieth-century Britain. Halliday¹⁷ and Soffer agree that they were: (1) Ethical or social work sociologists (e.g., L. T. Hobhouse,¹⁸ the Charity Organization Society, the Christian Social Union, and the Social Institutes Union); this movement, often inspired by the British idealist philosophical tradition of T. H. Green (1836-1882) and others,¹⁹ maintained a clear distinction between man and animal, stressing the rational mind and the ability for self-improvement; (2) Racial sociologists (e.g., Francis Galton,²⁰ the Eugenics Education Society, the National Eugenic Laboratory); this movement emphasized man’s genetic constitution rather than his rational capacity. Based on hereditary biology and the belief that society suffered from biological instability, adherents of racial sociology sought to control population growth for the

¹⁶ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959). “In England, for example, sociology as an academic discipline is still somewhat marginal, yet in much English journalism, fiction, and above all history, the sociological imagination is very well developed indeed” (19).

¹⁷ R. J. Halliday, “The Sociological Movement, the Sociological Society and the Genesis of Academic Sociology in Britain,” *Sociological Review* n.s. XVI (1968).

¹⁸ Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse (1864-1929); social philosopher and journalist; born in Cornwall, Hobhouse studied at Oxford in the 1880s and was influenced by the idealist thought of T. H. Green; 1897-1902 Hobhouse lived in Manchester and wrote for the *Manchester Guardian*; 1901 he published *Mind in Evolution*, 1906 *Morals in Evolution*; Hobhouse was appointed to the first chair of sociology in Britain at the London School of Economics in 1907, a post he held until his death; editor of *The Sociological Review* 1908-1910; published *Liberalism* (1911—his most enduring work), *Development and Purpose* (1913), and *Social Development* (1924) among other works.

¹⁹ Sandra M. den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation: A Study in Late Victorian Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

²⁰ Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911); human geneticist and eugenicist; born in Birmingham, Galton later created the word “eugenics” in 1883 out of the Greek roots for “beautiful” and “heredity” and authored the 1889 work *Natural Inheritance*.

betterment of the race and nation; (3) Civic sociologists and town planners (a movement centered at Outlook Tower in Edinburgh and after 1920 at Le Play House in London, and represented by Patrick Geddes and Victor Branford—two figures discussed below); this movement located human beings firmly within their environment, and sought a vision of sociology and biology that united heredity and natural environment. This third movement of sociology tried to accomplish its goals by popularizing the sociological method of Frédéric Le Play (1806-1882) and by establishing the “city” as the heart of sociological study. Sociology was the science of human interaction with the environment.²¹ This was the strand of British sociology that greatly influenced Christopher Dawson and will be discussed throughout this chapter.

The creation of the Sociological Society to promote the study of sociology at the university level was proposed in 1903 and the first meeting held in 1904. The Society was the result of a temporary alliance between the three schools of ethics/charities, eugenists, and town-planners. Early papers read at the Society were collected in *Sociological Papers* (1905-1907). These annual volumes were replaced by the quarterly *Sociological Review* in 1908 with L. T. Hobhouse as editor.²² The alliance ended in 1907 when the Eugenics Education Society formed and began publishing the *Eugenics Review* that year. The civics school created a separate Cities Committee within the Sociological Society in 1907-1908 to spread the ideas and methods of Patrick Geddes.²³ Hobhouse quit editing the *Review* in 1910 because of increasing division amongst the ranks. In 1920 Victor Branford and his wife Sybella established Le Play House as a center for civic sociology. Sir Francis Younghusband²⁴ was president of the Society from 1924 to 1927. When Branford died in 1930, the Sociological Society and Le Play House merged to form the Institute of Sociology with Oxford anthropologist R. R. Marett as president.²⁵

²¹ Halliday, "The Sociological Movement, the Sociological Society and the Genesis of Academic Sociology in Britain," 379-380.

²² Ibid.: 381, 395, footnote 1.

²³ Ibid.: 394.

²⁴ Sir Francis Edward Younghusband (1863-1942); explorer, geographer, and mystic; Younghusband was born in India and educated at Clifton College and at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. After being hit by a car in Belgium, Younghusband began to write his first book on religion during convalescence. *Within* (1912) was a vitalist mix of science and spirit. Younghusband loved nature and sought mystical encounter with it; see *The Heart of Nature* (1921), *Mother World* (1924), *The Living Universe* (1933), *Modern Mystics* (1935), and *Vital Religion* (1940).

²⁵ Soffer, "Why do Disciplines Fail? The Strange Case of British Sociology," 797. On Le Play House, see "Le Play House," *Sociological Review* 21 (1929): 160-1; David F. T. Evans, "Le Play

Dawson became involved with *The Sociological Review* just as Branford and his wife established Le Play house in London.²⁶ This journal provided the most important outlet for the ideas of Dawson during the 1920s. He contributed twelve articles²⁷ from 1920 to 1934 (many of them later re-published in books) and thirteen book reviews.²⁸ Along with Francis Younghusband, J. Arthur Thomson, Victor Branford, Rachel Annand Taylor, and Patrick Geddes, he delivered the paper "Religion and the Life of Civilization" at the Conference on Some Living Religions within the Empire, held at

House and the Regional Survey Movement in British Sociology 1920 - 1955" (City of Birmingham Polytechnic / CNA 1986, unpublished M.Phil thesis available at <http://www.dfte.co.uk/ios>, accessed March 2007).

²⁶ "LePlay House," *Sociological Review* XII (1920): 1.

²⁷ (1) Dawson, "The Passing of Industrialism." This piece was later published in Dawson's *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1933) at the end of which Dawson added a note: "This essay was written during the war and first printed in 1920. The crisis of modern industrialism has taken a very different form to that which I then predicted. Nevertheless and partly for this very reason, I think the essay still retains sufficient interest and actuality to justify its inclusion in the present volume" (63). (2) Christopher Dawson, "On the Development of Sociology in Relation to the Theory of Progress," *Sociological Review* XIII (1921). Later published in Dawson's *Dynamics of World History* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1957; Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002) as "Sociology and the Theory of Progress." (3) Christopher Dawson, "The Life of Civilisations," *Sociological Review* XIV (1922). (4) Christopher Dawson, "Herr Spengler and the Life of Civilisations," *Sociological Review* XIV (1922). Later published with additional material in *Dynamics of World History* as "Oswald Spengler and the Life of Civilizations." (5) Christopher Dawson and Alexander Farquharson, "The Beginnings of Rome," *Sociological Review* XV (1923). (6) Christopher Dawson, "A Scheme of British Culture Periods, and of their Relation to European Cultural Developments," *Sociological Review* XVI (1924). (7) Christopher Dawson, "Progress and Decay in Ancient and Modern Civilisation," *Sociological Review* XVI (1924). Part of this article was incorporated into Dawson's *Progress and Religion* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1929) and was republished in *Dynamics of World History*. (8) Christopher Dawson, "Religion and Primitive Culture," *Sociological Review* XVII (1925). (9) Christopher Dawson, "Civilisation and Morals; or, The Ethical Basis of Social Progress," *Sociological Review* XVII (1925). This piece was later published in Dawson's *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* and in *Dynamics of World History*. (10) Christopher Dawson, "Mystery of China," *Sociological Review* XIX (1927). Later published in *Enquiries into Religion and Culture*. (11) Christopher Dawson, "European Democracy and the New Economic Forces," *Sociological Review* XXII (1930). (12) Christopher Dawson, "Prevision in Religion," *Sociological Review* XXVI (1934). This was a paper read at the International Sociological Congress at Geneva in October 1933 as a contribution to the discussion of the general topic of Prevision in Sociology. It was later republished in *Dynamics of World History*.

²⁸ Dawson reviewed the following books for *The Sociological Review*: (1) *The History of Social Development*, by Dr. F. Müller-Lyer and translated by E. C. and H. A. Lake (1920) (XIII, 1921, pp. 116-117). (2) *The New Calendar of Great Men*, edited by Frederick Harrison, S. H. Swinny, and F. S. Marvin (1920) (XIII, 1921, pp. 179-181). (3) *Illustrations of the History of Medieval Thought and Learning*, by Reginald Lane Poole (2nd ed., 1920) (XIV, 1922, pp. 148-149). (4) *Arabic Thought and its Place in History*, by De Lacy O'Leary (1922) (XIV, 1922, pp. 237-238). (5) *Die Berliner Romantik*, by Josef Nadler (1921) (XV, 1923, pp. 166-167). (6) *The Hellenistic Age*, by J. B. Bury et. al. (1924) (XVI, 1924, p. 361). (7) *The Dravidian Element in Indian Culture*, by Gilbert Slater (1924) (XVI, 1924, pp. 364-365). (8) *The Children of the Sun: A Study in the Early History of Civilization*, by W. J. Perry (1924) (XVI, 1924, pp. 158-161). (9) *Small Houses of the Late Georgian Period: 1750-1820*, vol. I by Stanley C. Ramsey (1919), vol. II by Ramsey and J. D. M. Hervey (1923) (XVI, 1924, p. 76). (10) *Primitive Religion*, by Robert H. Lowie (1925) (XVIII, 1926, pp. 258-259). (11) *Danses et Légendes de la Chine Ancienne*, by Marcel Grant, 2 vols (1927) (XIX, 1927, pp. 260-261). (12) *Whither Mankind? A Panorama of Modern Civilization*, edited by C. A. Beard (1928) (XXI, 1929, pp. 256-257). (13) *Der Übergang vom Feudalen zum Bürgerlichen Weltbild*, by Franz Borkenau (1934) (XXVI, 1934, pp. 414-415).

the Imperial Institute, London, 22 September – 3 October 1924, under the auspices of the School of Oriental Studies (University of London) and the Sociological Society.²⁹ Dawson's nearness to this group around the *Sociological Review* is suggested by a personal letter sent by the American writer and social reformer Lewis Mumford (1895-1990) to Patrick Geddes (1854-1932): "All of us, Farquharson, Dawson, Ramsey, and the rest, would profit a good deal if you and Branford would put your heads together for a turn to discuss the *strategy* of our sociological attack."³⁰ Geddes and Dawson were friendly with each other, for in a letter just after Branford's death in June 1930 Geddes wrote to him that, "I'd value a day or two with you! & particularly to talk over those long views of *history* we have each been seeking (I'd come to Exeter for a week-end in early autumn, if you have time?)" He concluded, "Pardon my thus troubling you— & with so long a letter! but you are one of the few in the Society to whom I can look for criticism & counsel!"³¹

Victor Branford (1863-1930), businessman and sociologist, who praised Dawson's *Progress and Religion* for its "critical analysis and synthetic survey" in the pages of the *Review*,³² was central to the building of key institutions of British sociology, such as they were. He was one of Geddes's students in Edinburgh around 1890 and worked with Geddes on the museum and laboratory of city life called Outlook Tower on the Royal Mile. Branford helped to establish the Sociological Society (1903), *The Sociological Review* (1905), the first chair of sociology at the London School of

²⁹ Christopher Dawson, "Religion and the Life of Civilization," in *Religions of the Empire: A Conference on Some Living Religions with the Empire*, ed. William Loftus Hare (New York: Macmillan, 1925). The conference on religion was organized in connection with the Empire Exhibition of 1924. The first part of the religion conference focused on the oriental religions of the empire and the second part on the "psychology and sociology of religion" in which a "series of papers was read by specialists [Dawson and the others mentioned above] who expounded the religious process and its mode and purpose as it operated in their sphere of observation" (see p. 4 of the Introduction to this volume). Dawson's paper was also published in *The Quarterly Review* CCXLIC (1925): 98-115.

³⁰ Lewis Mumford to Patrick Geddes, 5 January 1924, in Frank G. Novak, Jr., ed., *Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes: The Correspondence* (London: Routledge, 1995), 189. Mumford had lived in London and edited *The Sociological Review* between April and October of 1920. He corresponded with Geddes between 1917 and 1932. Mumford himself wrote to Dawson in 1924: "Dear Mr. Dawson: I follow your writing with so much pleasure and profit that I cannot forbear to write you at last and make my acknowledgements. Your synopsis in the April number of the review is a masterly bit of work...." (8 May 1924, STA, box 15, folder 58 "Mumford, Lewis.") The "synopsis" Mumford referred to was: Dawson, "A Scheme of British Culture Periods, and of their Relation to European Cultural Developments." Stanley C. Ramsey was a member of the Sociological Society and author of *Small Houses of the Late Georgian Period: 1750-1820* (1924). Dawson reviewed Ramsey's book with high praise, for the author realized that "architecture is not merely a question of styles and individuals, but that it rests on deep social foundations, or rather that it is the vital expression of a great society." Christopher Dawson, review of *Small Houses of the Late Georgian Period: 1750-1820*, *Sociological Review* XVI (1924): 76.

³¹ Geddes to Dawson, 4 August 1930, STA, box 15, folder 135, p. 2, 3.

³² Victor Branford, review of *Progress and Religion*, *Sociological Review* XXI (1929): 362.

Economics (1907), and Le Play House (1920) in London. He edited the *Review* from 1912 until his death. In 1926 he was made an Honorary Member of the American Sociological Society in recognition of his contributions to establishing sociology in Britain.

Dawson remained in close touch with the school teacher, civil servant, and long-time member of the Sociological Society, Alexander Farquharson (born in Scotland in 1882). He and Dawson co-authored a two-part article on the city of Rome in 1923.³³ Farquharson helped the historian gain his first teaching post in 1925 as part-time lecturer in the History of Culture at Exeter University, then University College of the South West. He wrote to the principal, H. J. Hetherington,³⁴ introducing Dawson as “one of my most valued colleagues among the group interested in *The Sociological Review* and also a great friend.” He described him as “a life-long specialist in historical studies,” adding: “Working closely with him, as I have done, I have had convincing proof of his sound scholarship and remarkable range of knowledge; indeed I do not know anyone who has quite the same clear and broad view of civilization in its historical development.” With this recommendation, a post was created for Dawson.³⁵

This new position may have played a role in drawing Dawson away from the Sociological Society group, as Geddes remarked in a letter to Mumford: “I don’t think Spengler was sent to *Sociological Review* for review, but I’m asking Branford. Certainly Dawson would do a thoughtful critique—but somehow he seems to be dropping out of *Review*, whether too busy with his History Chair at Exeter (a new start), or having altered his views & diverged from us, as a good Catholic may not unnaturally do, though we are not so unsympathetic as may appear.”³⁶

Nevertheless, Farquharson and Dawson remained close. In April of 1925: “Do you think it will be possible to pay us a visit before long?” Dawson wrote to him from

³³ Dawson and Farquharson, “The Beginnings of Rome.”

³⁴ Sir Hector James Wright Hetherington (1888-1965), sometime university administrator at Exeter, Liverpool, and Glasgow. Born at Cowdenbeath, Dunfermline, Hetherington later took honors degrees in classics, philosophy, and economics at the University of Glasgow. His social conscience was stirred by the poverty of Glasgow and strongly reinforced by his professor of moral philosophy, Sir Henry Jones, on whom Hetherington published a biography in 1924. Hetherington’s other publications included: *Social Purpose* (1918, with J. H. Muirhead) and *International Labour Legislation* (1920); he was knighted in 1936.

³⁵ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*. Farquharson’s letter quoted p. 75.

³⁶ Geddes to Mumford, 12 February 1927, in Novak, ed., *Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes: The Correspondence*, 259. Geddes must have been referring to the new English translation of Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West* in 1926, for Dawson had already reviewed the first volume of the German edition in 1922; see Dawson, “Herr Spengler and the Life of Civilisations.”

Dawlish, Devonshire. “I am so very anxious to see you again.”³⁷ Sometime during the mid 1920s, before *Progress and Religion* appeared, Dawson wrote from Dawlish: “Have you come across anything new on sociology of late? The great problem to me is to explain the development of sociology after Herbert Spencer, up to then there is a continuous tradition, afterwards everything becomes confused (until at least one gets Geddes & Branford taking up the old tradition of Comte).”³⁸ In 1932 he again wrote to Farquharson complaining of the trouble he was having obtaining recent literature in sociology. “The London Library is very deficient there, & the Times Book Club won’t buy sociological books on the ground that they are ‘not of general interest.’ Alas! Too true.”³⁹ In 1945 Farquharson wrote to Dawson after the latter was forced out of his position as editor of *The Dublin Review*. Farquharson sincerely regretted the change. “I have read the Review regularly and with care during your editorship and cannot easily find words to say how much I have admired your conduct of the periodical and how greatly I have gained by studying it,” he wrote. “Under your guidance the Review was taking a notable place as an organ of sociological discussion. Were your policy to be followed for a generation I believe that the cause of Catholic thought and scholarship in this country would be assisted in an outstanding degree.”⁴⁰

One can glimpse from their correspondence Dawson’s reputation among those around *The Sociological Review*. Farquharson encouraged Dawson to give a paper at the International Sociological Congress in Geneva, 18-24 October 1933. “I do think that it is of real importance that there should be a contribution from you to the Geneva papers,” he wrote to Dawson, still based in Dawlish. He continued: “You already know of the new arrangements for the *Sociological Review* which will commence from January next: the *Review* from thenceforward being in the control of an Editorial Board consisting of Ginsberg, Carr Saunders and myself. ...All three of us are unanimous in wishing that [the January issue] should contain a contribution by yourself as one of the very few people who can claim outstanding importance in the English sociological world.” Carr Saunders,⁴¹ Farquharson said, “speaks in the

³⁷ Dawson to Farquharson, 25 April 1925, KA-AF, folder “Christopher Dawson Letters.”

³⁸ Dawson to Farquharson, 24 December (nd), KA-AF, folder “Christopher Dawson Letters.”

³⁹ Dawson to Farquharson, 19 April 1932, KA-AF, folder “Christopher Dawson Letters.”

⁴⁰ Farquharson to Dawson, 5 February 1945, STA, box 14, folder 127 “Farquharson, Alexander and Dormea.”

⁴¹ Carr Saunders (1886-1966), sociologist and academic administrator educated in biology; he directed the London School of Economics from 1937-1965.

warmest terms of the value of your work, and of its importance in non-catholic circles.”⁴² Dawson did not end up going to Geneva, but his paper was read there by someone else and published in *The Sociological Review* as “Prevision in Religion.”⁴³ Several months later Farquharson wrote to Dawson: “We had a meeting of the Editorial Board of the *Review* yesterday, and a very keen discussion upon your sociology of which I shall tell you more when we meet.”⁴⁴

If Dawson possessed “outstanding importance in the English sociological world,” at least in the eyes of Farquharson, and if those around the *Review* were discussing “Dawson’s sociology,” what were the elements of it?

On Human Ecology and Thinking Sociologically

British sociology of the 1920s influenced Dawson in two important ways: (1) that a healthy relationship between *environment* and *human organism* is an essential condition of human culture, and (2) that the social life of human beings must be studied comprehensively from the perspective of several academic disciplines. These two points were the foundations of Dawson’s sociological thought, and this section of the chapter will attempt to elaborate on them.

Through the Sociological Society and Patrick Geddes, sociology for Dawson came to be a kind of *human ecology*. He understood culture as a common way of life, a cooperation of environment, economics, and a specific people. Such a broad social scientific view necessitated the cooperation of several disciplines in order to account for all the factors in cultural life.

Dawson’s search for intellectual synthesis through the social sciences was part of a broader intellectual trend related to the deeply felt need for social reconstruction during the post-war 1920s. During that decade there was a strong current in British social thought emphasizing “holistic,” “organic,” and “cooperative” models of social renewal. In 1926 Jan Christiaan Smuts published *Holism and Evolution*, coining the word “holism” and derivative words such as “holistic” and “holistically.”⁴⁵ Smuts

⁴² Farquharson to Dawson, 27 July 1933, KA-AF, folder “Dawson, C. Lectures and Letters.”

⁴³ Dawson, “Prevision in Religion.”

⁴⁴ Farquharson to Dawson, 3 October 1933, KA-AF, folder “Christopher Dawson Letters.”

⁴⁵ “Holism,” OED. Smuts (1870-1950), prime minister of South Africa (1919-1924, and 1939-1948), army officer, and writer on evolution; b. to an Afrikaner family and fought against the British in the second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902); worked for the unification of South Africa, helped refashion the modern Commonwealth, played a notable role in Paris in 1919 and Ireland in 1921, established the framework for the League of Nations, and inspired the preamble to the charter of the United Nations

argued that “Holism” underlay the synthetic or holistic quality of the universe which made possible the origin and evolution of organic wholes. The idea of “wholes” covered both inorganic substances and the highest manifestations of the human spirit.⁴⁶ Though Smuts’s thinking about philosophy and evolution developed long before the Great War, the publication of his book after that war was symptomatic of a post-war society fueled by a deep sense of civilizational crisis.⁴⁷ In some social thinkers of the 1920s that sense of crisis partly inspired expressions of social renewal in terms of integration of human knowledge. This tendency toward synthesis could be seen in such diverse books and events as: *The Outline of History* (1920) by H. G. Wells, the 1922 Oxford Conference on the Correlation of the Social Sciences, *Speculum Mentis* (1924) by R. G. Collingwood, *The Bow in the Clouds: An Essay towards the Integration of Experience* (1931) by E. I. Watkin, and *Life: Outlines of General Biology* by J. Arthur Thomson and Patrick Geddes (1931).

As chapter one recounted, Dawson’s first book *The Age of the Gods* (1928)⁴⁸ was perceived by reviewers as a striking work of synthesis. *Progress and Religion* (1929) continued this project, including chapters on sociology, history, anthropology, and comparative religion in the study of human culture and its biological, intellectual, and spiritual elements. A major theme of *Progress and Religion* was the importance of the biological foundations of human culture, referred to today as “human ecology.” The epistemological thrust of this human ecology in Dawson was the correlation of biology and sociology, a correlation that was also an important goal of British social thought in general during the 1920s. In an article called “Biology and Values in Interwar Britain,” Roger Smith discusses the importance of biology to social thought

Organization. Nature shaped Smuts’s view of religion: “the highest religion is the Religion of the Mountain”; see entry by Shula Marks, ODNB (accessed 15 March 2009).

⁴⁶ J. C. Smuts, *Holism and Evolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), v, 86, 184. Dawson knew of this book and took notes on it—see Christopher Dawson’s Notebook, STA, box 9, folder 18 “Notebook 1922-1925 Philosophy.”

⁴⁷ Richard Overly, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 2.

⁴⁸ Dawson’s Oxford tutor recommended *Age of the Gods*, his first book, to the publisher John Murray. He praised Dawson’s “union of solid scholarship and philosophic grasp,” and said that, “What Mr. Dawson has written is no ordinary ‘Outline of History.’ It is based on archaeological and sociological study: it is original in its treatment and its suggestions.” See Barker’s letter to Murray, 28 March 1927, NLS. Murray wrote to Dawson on 9 May 1927 (NLS): “We have given careful consideration to your manuscript. ... I am sorry to say that the sale for books of the kind is not what it used to be, for, since the War, much less attention is paid by the general public to serious books; but yours seems to us so good in every way that we hope its merit may help it to success.”

between the World Wars by highlighting the work of Charles Scott Sherrington (1857-1952) and Julian S. Huxley (1887-1975).⁴⁹

But the immediate influence on Dawson in this correlation of biology and sociology was not Sherrington or Huxley; it was the biologist Patrick Geddes and his interpretation of the French sociologist Pierre Frédéric Guillaume Le Play (1806-1882). The work of Le Play was crucial for linking Geddes, *The Sociological Review*, and Dawson's first two books together. As a young man Geddes had gone to London to study evolution under Thomas H. Huxley (1825-1895), grandfather of Julian Huxley and the greatest proponent of evolution at the time (1870s). Huxley sent Geddes to study in Paris, and while there he met Edmond Demolins⁵⁰ of the Le Playist Société d'Economie Sociale. He was introduced to the attempts being made to develop a social science inspired by the thought of Frédéric Le Play dedicated to securing peaceful social evolution in the future. Le Play, an engineer and sociologist, wrote his great work *Les Ouvriers Européens* (1855) as a social study of European workers from Russia to England. Le Play analyzed social structure in terms of family, work, and place. "This interested Geddes intensively—he saw it as the mission to which he wanted to devote his life."⁵¹ Inspired by his time in Paris, Geddes brought the news of the Le Play school of thought to Scotland. He started Outlook Tower in 1892 (Edinburgh) as a civic observatory, sociology laboratory, and museum dedicated to the Le Playist perspective. Geddes organized Edinburgh Summer Schools in the 1890s which brought in speakers versed in Le Play's ideas. His sociology of "civics" trained young people to cherish their environment for the benefit of future generations. Victor Branford (a student of Geddes) adopted all of this with an enthusiasm that moved him to found the Sociological Society in 1903 and Le Play House in Westminster in 1920. This gave much wider publicity to Le Play in Britain,⁵² and inspired regional and civic surveys and local studies. Le Play's "family, work, place" expanded to become "folk, work, place" or "FWP," and this formula of foundational social structures (see Appendix B) was often discussed by various

⁴⁹ Roger Smith, "Biology and Values in Interwar Britain: C. S. Sherrington, Julian Huxley and the Vision of Progress," *Past and Present* (2003).

⁵⁰ Edmond Demolins was first editor of *La Réforme Sociale*, a journal of the Le Play school that started publication in 1881.

⁵¹ "Geddes, Patrick (1854-1932)," entry by Helen Meller, ODNB.

⁵² Le Play also made waves in the United States, Portugal, Germany, Russia, Turkey, and Spain; see Michael Z. Brooke, *Le Play: Engineer and Social Scientist: The Life and Work of Frédéric Le Play* (London: Longman, 1970), 136-137.

writers (especially Geddes) in *The Sociological Review*. In a letter to Dawson, Mumford found these structures “highly useful as a check to keep one from leaving out data that the less rigorous categories might let one neglect,”⁵³ and Dawson himself largely adopted the “Geddes-Le Play formula” of FWP in his account of social life.

Dawson noted that the Frenchman provided a basis on which biology and sociology could be linked:

F. J. Le Play was a Catholic and a Conservative, at once a man of faith and a man of facts, who loved his Europe and desired to bring it back to the foundations of social prosperity, which he believed to be endangered by the doctrines of revolutionary Liberalism. Nevertheless his method of study was more biological and more in harmony with the spirit of Darwin himself than any of the ambitious evolutionary theories or writers like Herbert Spencer or Lewis Morgan.

His great work, *Les Ouvriers Européens*, consists of a detailed study of fifty-seven specimen families in different parts of Europe, from the Urals to the Pennines and the Pyrenees, based on the result of the direct observation of their economic life in its adaptation to nature and the social organization. His attention was especially directed to the primary nature-occupations which are the foundations of all material culture. These fundamental types are six in number; first the hunters and food gatherers, secondly the pastoral peoples, thirdly the fishermen of the sea coasts, fourthly the agriculturalists, fifthly the foresters, and sixthly the miners. Not only does each of these types possess its appropriate geographical environment...but each of them is also represented in any typical civilized natural region. As has been shown by Professor Geddes and Mr. Victor Branford, who have done so much to introduce and extend the methods of Le Play in this country, every river valley contains, at least potentially and as it were in section, every type of natural occupation, from the shepherd and the miner in the hills, through the woodmen of the uplands to the lowland farmers and the fishermen of the coast.⁵⁴

Dawson specifically mentioned the work of Geddes and Branford in this quotation from his book *Progress and Religion* (1929). He wrote that, “Le Play’s methods are far from being merely heuristic. As Professor Geddes has pointed out, the three factors which Le Play regards as the primary constituents of social life—Place, Work and Family or People, correspond to the biological formula—Environment, Function and Organism, and thus provide a basis for the correlation of sociological and biological science.”⁵⁵ *Correlation*—here Dawson’s concern, along with others during the 1920s to coordinate various disciplines of human knowledge in interest of seeing the “whole picture,” was evident. Indeed, his entire book on progress was an attempt to view cultural development from the perspectives of different disciplines.

Le Play was significant for another reason. “The first thoroughly objective study of human life in relation to its geographical environment and its economic functions,”

⁵³ Mumford to Dawson, STA, box 15, folder 58 “Mumford, Lewis.”

⁵⁴ Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry* (1929; Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 51-52. Dawson cited the 6th volume of Le Play’s *Les Ouvriers Européens*, 2nd ed. of 1879; the work was first published in 1855.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

Dawson wrote, “was due to a man who knew nothing of anthropology and had little sympathy with earlier sociological theories.”⁵⁶ Indeed, a biographer notes, Le Play “began the study of societies, he has told us in noteworthy words, in order to answer this question: ‘Beavers, ants, bees and other social animals achieve stability and peace in their little worlds. Is man alone condemned to see his laborious creations perish in ruin and disaster?’”⁵⁷ In 1837 Le Play was sent to inspect the Donetz (modern Ukraine) coalfield, where he found himself on the steppes among a society very unlike his own. “‘My eyes,’ he writes, ‘were suddenly opened to the true meaning of history and of contemporary facts.’ He saw for the first time what the complexity of western society disguises, that every occupation leads to the development of a certain type of family, adapted to the nature of the occupation. Around this family type spring up religious, moral and ethical ideals which become part of the soul of a nation and make it what it is.”⁵⁸ “‘My path was clear,’ he writes, ‘from the moment I perceived that in Social Science there was nothing to invent.’”⁵⁹

Nothing to invent: that was a central scientific insight of Le Play which Dawson celebrated. Le Play’s importance rested on his scientific (observational) methodology and his linking of the human environment and the work-function to sociology. Le Play, Dawson wrote, studied working families not at second hand, “through statistics and blue-books, but by the direct observation of their way of life and by a meticulous study of their family budgets, which he used as a basis for the quantitative analysis of the facts of family life. Le Play’s method of social analysis affords an insight into just those fundamental social realities which so often escape the notice of the historian and the student of politics.”⁶⁰ For Le Play, the natural environment was structured by human labor to shape a *mode of life*,⁶¹ which resembled Dawson’s simple definition of “culture” as a “common way of life—a particular adjustment of man to his natural

⁵⁶ Ibid., 51. Philippe Périer, co-editor of the *International Review of Sociology*, agreed with Dawson assessment. Périer remarked in his Foreword to Michael Brooke’s biography of Le Play that, “Le Play should justly be recognized as the first person to have developed a scientific method for the observation of social facts, and to have personally applied this method for twenty-five years in almost every country of Europe.” See Brooke, *Le Play: Engineer and Social Scientist: The Life and Work of Frédéric Le Play*, vii. Le Play did not use the word “sociologist,” being suspicious of Comte.

⁵⁷ Dorothy Herbertson, *The Life of Frédéric Le Play*, ed. Victor Branford and Alexander Farquharson (Ledbury: Le Play House, 1950), 105. Herbertson did not give a citation for this quotation.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 48.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 106.

⁶⁰ Dawson, “Sociology as a Science,” 23.

⁶¹ Herbertson, *The Life of Frédéric Le Play*, 111.

surroundings and his economic needs.”⁶² In fact, for Dawson, “the process of the development of a culture has a considerable analogy to that of a biological species or subspecies. A new biological type arises in response to the requirements of the environment, normally perhaps as the result of the segregation of a *community* in a new or changing environment.”⁶³

Le Play provided the bridge between biology and sociology for many writers in *The Sociological Review*. In a 1919 article, S. H. Swinny⁶⁴ published “Sociology: Its Successes and its Failures,” a paper delivered to the Sociological Society the year before. He wrote:

Indeed, the work of Le Play in sociology bears a curious analogy to that of his contemporary, Darwin, in biology. Just as Darwin showed that a powerful agent in biological evolution was the effect of the environment, not exercised directly, but through the survival and reproduction of the forms most in harmony with it, so Le Play, solving the problem that had baffled Montesquieu, showed that the immediate physical environment of men affected the structure of society, not directly, but through the forms of industry which it imposed.⁶⁵

In his 1923 article for the *Review* already referred to, biologist J. Arthur Thomson agreed with Swinny on the importance of Le Play’s insights. “Fundamental in Biology is the Organism-Function-Environment relation, the three sides of the prism of life. The living creature, its activities, and its surroundings must be considered together; they form an inseparable trinity. If Biology has any contributions to make to Sociology it must make them within these three co-ordinates, which become in Sociology,—Folk, Work, Place: or Famille, Travail, Lieu.”⁶⁶

Le Play’s influence on social commentary and sociology permeated the *The Sociological Review* during the 1920s. The English biographer of Le Play, Dorothy Herbertson, wrote “Leplay and Social Science”⁶⁷ in 1921; in the same year S. H. Swinny penned “The Sociological School of Comte and Leplay” in which he wrote

⁶² Christopher Dawson, *The Age of the Gods: A Study in the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient East* (London: John Murray, 1928), xiii.

⁶³ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 52.

⁶⁴ Shapland Hugh Swinny (1857-1923), editor of the *Positivist Review*; President of the London Positivist Society from 1901 and of the English Positivist Committee from 1904; writer on the history of Ireland and frequent contributor to periodicals. See WwW, vol. II, 789.

⁶⁵ S. H. Swinny, “Sociology: Its Successes and its Failures,” *Sociological Review* XI (1919): 3. Elsewhere, Swinny calls Le Play’s formula perhaps “one of the most original discoveries in the history of science; the result of this discovery was to open up a new line of enquiry in sociology, not opposed to the historical method....” See S. H. Swinny, “The Sociological Schools of Comte and Leplay,” *Sociological Review* XIII (1921): 71. Branford, editor of the *Review*, insisted on the popularization of the Frenchman’s name as “Leplay.”

⁶⁶ J. Arthur Thomson, “Biological Contributions to Sociology,” *Sociological Review* XV (1923): 85.

⁶⁷ Dorothy Herbertson, “Leplay and Social Science,” *Sociological Review* XIII (1921); Herbertson, *The Life of Frédéric Le Play*. In *The Sociological Review*, “Le Play” was sometimes popularized to “Leplay.”

that, "Spencer hoped that the main outlines of sociology could be deduced from the Law of the Survival of the Fittest, to which all organisms, including the social organism, must submit." But, praising Le Play, he wrote that, "Life is the interaction of organism and environment. For the social man and for society itself, this environment is social as well as cosmic and biological."⁶⁸ Also in 1921, a certain J. Hume Menzies unfavorably reviewed *The Economics of Welfare* by A. C. Pigou (1877-1959), professor of economics at Cambridge. Menzies wrote that a sociologist who took the ideas of Le Play seriously, "cannot regard the objective of the industrial system as either the highest possible production of wealth at the lowest possible cost, or yet as the best possible distribution of the world's commodities amongst its population." He continued: "To the sociologist, production and wealth exist only as an instrument towards welfare, not as the economic end. The real object of an industrial system is, *not* the production of goods, but the creation and upkeep of institutions in which a man can exercise his activities so as to realize best his highest self."⁶⁹

Dawson's sociology testified to the influence of the "biological minds" of Le Play and Patrick Geddes. Their focus on human interaction with environment (as expressed by FWP) decisively shaped his thinking on cultural development and his social commentary during the 1920s and early 1930s. For *The English Review* of 1933 Dawson wrote an article called "The World Crisis and the English Tradition" in which he wrote (recalling Menzies above): "The first consideration for a society is not to maintain the volume of its industrial production or even 'the standard of life' in the current sense of the expression, but the quality of its population, and that cannot be secured by the mere expenditure of money on the so-called 'social services,' but only by the preservation of the natural foundations of society: the family and the land." While Dawson's childhood intimacy with his family and the rural landscape of England undoubtedly shaped his mature thinking, Le Play and Geddes gave him a language. True social renewal, Dawson argued, involved studying the foundations of society beneath even commerce and industry. The "economic mechanism" had to be adapted to the needs of the social organism. Science and technology should serve both rural life and urban industry. A better balance between rural and urban England should be sought in order to strengthen the whole structure of the social organism.

⁶⁸ Swinny, "The Sociological Schools of Comte and Leplay," 68.

⁶⁹ J. Hume Menzies, review of *The Economics of Welfare*, *Sociological Review* XIII (1921): 258.

That involved distributing more evenly social leadership and non-economic resources between the city and the countryside.⁷⁰

Dawson thought that the great problems of industry in England, the coal business and the “heavy industries,” were symptoms of economic and social changes that had produced a “revolution in the relations of man to nature and in the vital structure of society itself. They have destroyed the biological equilibrium between human society and its natural environment.”⁷¹ Modern urban civilization, he thought, had lost contact with the soil and the instinctive life of nature, leading to artificial conditions with increasing demand on men’s nervous energies. “This complete revolution in the conditions of life must inevitably have a profound effect upon the future of mankind. For it is not merely a transformation of material culture, it involves a biological change which must affect the character of the race itself.”⁷² One of his fundamental critiques of modern progress was its failure to account for human ecology. He wrote:

The rawness and ugliness of modern European life is the sign of biological inferiority, of an insufficient or false relation to the environment, which produces strain, wasted effort, revolt or failure. Just as a mechanical, industrial civilization will seek to eliminate all waste movements in work, so as to make the operative the perfect complement of his machine, so a vital civilization will cause every function and every act to partake of vital grace and beauty. To a great extent this is entirely instinctive, as in the grace of the old agricultural operations, ploughing, sowing and reaping, but it is also the goal of conscious effort in the great Oriental cultures—as in the calligraphy of the Moslem scribe, and the elaboration of Oriental social etiquette. Why is the stockbroker less beautiful than a Homeric warrior or an Egyptian priest? Because he is less incorporated with life; he is not inevitable, but accidental, almost parasitic. When a culture has proved its real needs and organized its vital functions, every office becomes beautiful.

...No civilization, however advanced, can afford to neglect these ultimate foundations in the life of nature and the natural region on which its social welfare depends, for even the highest achievements of science and art and economic organization are powerless to avert decay, if the vital functions of the social organism become impaired. Apparent progress is often accompanied by a process of social degeneration or decomposition, which destroys the stability of a civilization, but, as Le Play insisted, this process is not an inevitable one. However far the process of degeneration has gone, there is always a possibility of regeneration, if society recovers its functional equilibrium and restores its lost contacts with the life of nature.⁷³

The themes of environment, nature, agriculture, function, vitality, and social welfare were central to his contemporary observations during the 1920s and early 1930s, after which he turned to more political questions.

⁷⁰ Christopher Dawson, “The World Crisis and the English Tradition,” in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1956; Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002), 234-236. This article first appeared as: Christopher Dawson, “The World Crisis and the English Tradition,” *English Review* LVI (1933).

⁷¹ Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1929), 211.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 212.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

Dawson's work must be seen in the context of the postwar movement in Britain to restate a basis for society. His concept of culture as a common way of life in *The Age of the Gods*, even his understanding of progress in *Progress and Religion*, all drew from the synthesis of social thought of the 1920s. Dawson based his social criticism on his fundamental ecological understanding of human nature and human society. Through his exposure to *The Sociological Review* and some of the leading social thinkers in Britain during the 1920s, Dawson formed a clear conception of sociological thought: it must be based on scientific observation of the structures of human life (FWP) and the ways that human society and human ecology are related. This required the help of several disciplines of knowledge in the pursuit of comprehensive understanding of human culture.

On Medieval History and How *Not* to Think Sociologically

Medieval history was Dawson's sociological case-study. In 1934 he published *Medieval Religion*, which included an essay on "The Sociological Foundations of Medieval Christendom." Here he discussed the ways in which a fully formed religion (Christianity) entered into a culture still in the process of formation and thus became one of the constituent elements of the new culture then growing up. He was fascinated by the sociological organs through which this process of spiritual struggle and social change occurred. "It is characteristic of medieval religion that its spiritual ideals found expression in a definite sociological organism. The spiritual life was not a vague aspiration, or an abstract idea; it was a *life* in the full sense of the word, an organized pattern of behaviour which was embodied in distinct institutional forms...."⁷⁴

Dawson was widely regarded as a medievalist—he published *The Making of Europe* in 1932, *Medieval Religion and Other Essays* in 1934, and then later *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (1950), *Medieval Essays* (1954), and *The Formation of Christendom* (1967). Some reviewers saw him as a typical Catholic historian who idealized the Middle Ages. This section will examine this claim and seek to demonstrate that while there was some truth in it, Dawson was significant precisely because he brought an already formed sociology *to* his study of the Middle Ages, he did not take a sociology *from* his study of the Middle Ages, as the early twentieth-

⁷⁴ ———, *Medieval Essays* (1954; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 51, 61.

century “medievalism” would often do. If biology and sociology were foundations of unified visions of social reconstruction after the Great War, so other visions of reconstruction were influenced by perceptions of the Middle Ages. Some interwar social thinkers perceived an organic unity in medieval life between peoples, economics, places, and church. “Medievalist” thinking became a kind of ready-made sociology, a “baptized” version of sociology that some Christian writers latched onto during the interwar years. Consideration of this tendency toward “nostalgic sociology” will highlight Dawson’s implicit critique of this form of sociological thinking and demonstrate what it meant for him *not* to think sociologically.

“Medievalism” arose as a word around 1850 and was used by the art critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) shortly afterward to refer to a style of art and a whole way of life as distinct from the classical and the modern. If the word today refers to literary, artistic, and historical interest in and interpretation of the Middle Ages, from its beginnings in Ruskin “medievalism” implied comparative valuation between historical epochs.⁷⁵ In that comparative sense, “medievalism” entered into the critical commentary on modern industrial society from Ruskin and the literary socialist William Morris (1834-1896) to the journalist and writer G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936). The medievalist tradition of social criticism lasted into the interwar period, taking on even political implications.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ “Medievalism,” OED (accessed 18 March 2009), Clare A. Simmons, ed., *Medievalism and the Quest for the “Real” Middle Ages* (Portland: Frank Cass, 2001), 1. “Medievalism” as a literary and cultural phenomenon of the interwar years in Britain appeared in figures such as T. E. Lawrence, J. R. R. Tolkien, G. K. Chesterton, and in the remembrance of the dead in the Great War, as in the neo-Gothic War Memorial in Edinburgh Castle. Medievalism was a casualty of the Second World War, not the First. See M. D. Allen, *The Medievalism of Lawrence of Arabia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991); John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-Earth* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 2003); Chene Heady, “Heraldry and Red Hats: Linguistic Skepticism and Chesterton’s Revision of Ruskinian Medievalism,” in *Medievalism and the Quest for the “Real” Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Simmons (Portland: Frank Cass, 2001); Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For a survey of medievalism in English literature and graphic arts from the eighteenth through the twentieth century, see Michael Alexander, *Medievalism: The Middle Ages in Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁷⁶ Peter C. Grosvenor, “The British Anti-Moderns and the Medievalist Appeal of European Fascism,” *Chesterton Review* XXV (February/May 1999). Besides the literary and artistic medievalism in the interwar years mentioned in the previous footnote, and the sociological medievalism that is the subject of this section of the chapter, there was a “political medievalism” in the interwar years as well. Grosvenor writes of this in three representative persons: Saunders Lewis (1893-1985, founder of Welsh nationalism); A. J. Pentty (1875-1937, architect and writer); and Oswald Mosley (1896-1980, founder of the British Union of Fascists). The world views of these three men were influenced by medievalism which attracted them to the anti-modernism of the Fascist idea. However, Lewis and Pentty eventually realized that Fascism embodied many aspects of modernism that their medievalism ultimately led them to reject. By contrast, Mosely ultimately affirmed the Fascist project at the expense of his earlier medieval influences (104).

Medieval institutions such as the monastery and the guild received much attention by British social thinkers, held up as a standard for social institutions in which a working communal society was an alternative to modern individualism.⁷⁷ The Anglican A. J. Penty (1875-1937) worked as an architect and wrote in his spare time on social problems. He was involved in the Fabian Society and the Independent Labour Party during the 1890s, and was the inspiration behind the Guild Socialism movement which developed in reaction to Fabian “state socialism” and had some influence on the Left into the mid 1920s. Through this political work he formed an intellectual partnership with the British intellectual A. R. Orage (1873-1934) and wrote for *The New Age* before the Great War. He supported the arts and crafts movement, exchanged ideas with G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, and acknowledged the influence of John Ruskin. Penty’s social criticism developed through a total of thirteen books⁷⁸ and many articles and reviews in *The Guildsman*, the *Guild Socialist*, *G. K.’s Weekly*, *The Criterion*, the *New Witness*, *The Crusader*, and the *American Review*. In these pages he criticized industrialism through the eyes of the agrarianism and craftsmanship of the Middle Ages.

The war that ended in 1918 gave a greater intensity to Penty’s social criticism, as in his book *Post-Industrialism*: “The fact that the mechanical triumphs of our civilization so readily lent themselves to the purposes of destruction has destroyed, once and for ever, that hypnotic belief in the ultimate beneficence of science and machinery that was the faith of our generation...”⁷⁹ Penty’s *Towards a Christian Sociology* (1923) declared that, “Faith in Progress was until yesterday the faith of the modern world.” Events of the last six years, however, had made minds skeptical: industrialism promised the well-being of everyone, but the war proved otherwise.

⁷⁷ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), 19.

⁷⁸ For example: *The Restoration of the Guild System* (1906). This book did much to inspire the Guild Socialist movement that found expression in the National Guilds League in 1915; Penty broke with the league in 1917 because of its increasingly Marxist ideas. *Old Worlds for New: A Study of the Post-Industrial State* (1917) was a response to H. G. Wells’s *New Worlds for Old* of 1907; *A Guildsman’s Interpretation of History* (1920) criticized the idea of linear progress; *Post-Industrialism* (1922); *The Elements of Domestic Design* (1930). Penty’s architectural ideas greatly influenced his social critique. See also Edward J. Kiernan, *Arthur J. Penty: His Contribution to Social Thought* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of American Press, 1941) and Arthur J. Penty, *The Gauntlet: A Challenge to the Myth of Progress* (A First Anthology of the Works of Aurthur J. Penty) (Norfolk, VA: IHS, 2003).

⁷⁹ ———, *Post-Industrialism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1922), 11.

Militarism joined with the industrial order as an expression of the same disease: the worship of wealth and mechanism.⁸⁰

With these evils of society set against the destruction of the Great War in his imagination, Penty developed a systematic understanding of the principles of Christian sociology. For the Church, from the sociological point of view, the first requirement was to maintain the common standards of thought and morals for society.⁸¹ Penty's idea of a Christian sociology drew direct inspiration from the Middle Ages, a topic which occupied two chapters of the book. He examined the institutions of the Middle Ages because they were "in varying degrees the expressions of the spirit of Christianity," thus "they offer us a pattern that may be studied in the interests of a revival of Christendom."⁸² He wrote of the social *function* of the guilds and the monarchs which implied both rights and duties as inherent within those institutions.

John Lee⁸³ also drew attention to medieval institutions in his 1922 volume *Social Implications of Christianity*. His third chapter was called: "The Meaning of Welfare." Here Lee drew extensively from medieval history to remind his readers of principles: "What I am aiming at is merely to discover the essence of Christian welfare as it is manifested by the monastic system. In all its main features it was a household, and through all the secular work of the household ran the golden thread of religious observance. Here you have Christian social welfare at its highest...." While the medieval period had its own problems, many lessons could be learned from a time when, "Community was the aim and community was the method."⁸⁴

For lay Anglicans such as Penty as well as the Anglican Archbishops, concern for the relation between religion and society focused on economics. The Archbishops' report *Christianity and Industrial Problems* (1918, 1927) was critical of the competitive economic system and included a section on "Christian Principles and Their Social Application." The report turned to historical examples of the presence of Christian principles in society, specifically in the medieval era. While lambasting

⁸⁰ ———, *Towards a Christian Sociology* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1923), 24, 153.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 17, 28-29, 44, 47, 55.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 69.

⁸³ John Lee (1867-1928) Controller of the Central Telegraph Office, 1919-1927; educated in Belfast; lecturer at various Industrial Conferences at Oxford and Cambridge; author of many books on economics, the industrial system (e.g., *Principles of Industrial Welfare*, 1924), and Christian Social duty (especially during the 1920s).

⁸⁴ John Lee, *The Social Implications of Christianity* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1922), 48, 50-51.

medieval times for failing to denounce serfdom and accepting poverty as “part of an unalterable order,” the report said that that “characteristic of mediæval thought on social relationships—the thought not only of the ‘thinkers’ but of some part at least of the practical world—was the attempt to regard all economic questions as a sub-department of the grand interest of human life—religion.”⁸⁵ The report also recommended that contemporary preparation of clergy for the ministry should include training in economic and social science.⁸⁶

Various Church of England clergy were involved on the edges of the Sociological Society. One such was the Rev. W Rowland Jones. “Medieval Christianity in England,” he wrote, “was essentially co-operative and democratic. Folk, Work and Place (if we may use the terminology of Le Play) were held together by the mystic bond of the Catholic Faith.” He continued, astonishingly: “The aspirations of the practical sociologist, whether he admits it or not, are largely the ideals of the medieval Catholic.”⁸⁷ During the early twentieth century, “religious sociology” made a significant contribution to British sociology as a whole (as it did in France and the United States). In fact, the Established Church in England saw sociology as a kind of applied Christianity and supported it enthusiastically.⁸⁸

In their social teaching the popes also found medieval examples useful. The precedent for this had been set by Pope Leo XIII (reigning 1873-1903) who laid the foundation of modern Catholic social teaching by his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891). In that document and in other writings, reflection on the medieval experience of Christianity played a crucial role in defining the attitudes which ought to be

⁸⁵ *Christianity and Industrial Problems*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1927), 50, 52, 57. The committee who prepared the document included the chair, Edward S. Talbot, Bishop of Winchester; Charles Gore, Bishop of Oxford; and R. H. Tawney. It was first published in 1918. Bishop Talbot wrote the “Introduction to the Reissue” in 1927 and stated that the work was reissued because the 29,000 copies of the first edition had been exhausted.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 168. For more on Anglican social and political thought during this period, see Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004).

⁸⁷ W. Rowland Jones, “Sociology and the Church of England,” *Sociological Review* XVII (1925): 132, 134.

⁸⁸ John D. Brewer, “Sociology and Theology Reconsidered: Religious Sociology and the Sociology of Religion in Britain,” *History of the Human Sciences* XX (2007): 8, 16. Brewer defined “religious sociology” as sociology in support of the ethical tenets of faith (8). See also: Brian Taylor, “The Anglican Clergy and the Early Development of British Sociology,” *The Sociological Review* XLII (1994). Some lay Roman Catholics in Britain also wrote of a “Catholic sociology”; see Michael de la Bédoyère, “An Introduction to Catholic Sociology,” *Dublin Review* CXCI (1933); J. Arthur O’Connor, “The Issues of Catholic Sociology,” *Dublin Review* CXCI (1934).

adopted in facing contemporary problems.⁸⁹ In 1922 Pope Pius XI (reigning 1922-1939), in an encyclical reflecting on the evils released into the world by the Great War and their possible solutions, wrote: “No merely human institution of today can be as successful in devising a set of international laws which will be in harmony with world conditions as the Middle Ages were in the possession of that true League of Nations, Christianity. It cannot be denied that in the Middle Ages this law was often violated; still it always existed as an ideal, according to which one might judge the acts of nations, and a beacon light calling those who had lost their way back to the safe road.”⁹⁰ In his 1937 encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*, Pius wrote that under the influence of the Church in the Middle Ages there arose “prodigious charitable organizations, great guilds of artisans and workingmen of every type. These guilds, ridiculed as ‘medieval’ by the liberalism of the last century, are today claiming the admiration of our contemporaries in many countries who are endeavoring to revive them in some modern form.”⁹¹

Eileen Power (1889-1940), one of the first female economic historians and a medievalist, wrote an article in 1922 for *Economica* looking back to medieval political institutions for inspiration. In “A Plea for the Middle Ages,” she criticized a certain idealization of Aristotle’s *Politics* and the Greek conception of the polis as a factor in the rise of the modern, absolute state. This historical development led to two problems: war among states (the Great War) and the “bankruptcy of political life among individuals.” Rather than look to the Greeks, Power argued, look to the Middle Ages for a political philosophy which better fits the conditions of modern life. The Middle Ages, though hardly a golden age and full of practical failures, evolved a number of extremely valuable ideas, such as the need for both international unity (Christendom) and the need to be a member of a local or functional association (monastic orders, orders of chivalry, self-governing towns, guilds, manors). “The mediæval view of society was essentially that it was a *community of communities*.” The most revolutionary contemporary thinkers, Power wrote, in the political or

⁸⁹ Giulio Silano, “The Church’s Social Doctrine and the Middle Ages: Leo XIII and Toniolo,” in *Medievalism: The Future of the Past*, ed. Joseph Goering and Francesco Guardiani (New York: Legas, 2000), 181.

⁹⁰ Pope Pius XI, *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio* (1922), par. 45. See the Vatican website at www.va.com (accessed 12 April 2007). In 1931 Pius XI again attacked the liberal economic order in *Quadragesimo Anno*, asserting the necessity of the common good and the proper subordination of economic life to an effective directing principle (par. 88).

⁹¹ ———, *Divini Redemptoris* (1937), par. 37. See the Vatican website at www.va.com (accessed 12 April 2007).

economic or ecclesiastical field, now espouse views which are essentially medieval. "The Middle Ages are not mediæval" in the pejorative sense, she concluded, "they are ultra modern."⁹²

The word "Christendom" was commonly used in Christian social criticism of the 1920s and into the 1930s to express the need for the Church to relate in some way to society. *The Return of Christendom* (1922) brought together a diverse number of "churchmen."⁹³ In his introduction, Bishop Charles Gore (1853-1932) enumerated the common principles among the group: (1) All are Socialists, in the sense that they believe a healthy industrial and social fabric cannot be built on individualism and an unrestricted Right of Private Property. Only a true idea of society can heal the "Acquisitive Society." (2) All contributors reject Marxian materialism and Communism. (3) They believe that the Labour Movement in Britain is weak because it lacks clear principles. (4) The root of justice, brotherhood, and social service is in the Christian doctrine of God. (5) The contributors do not share the current fear of dogma in religion.⁹⁴

Why this fascination with *Christendom*? Historian and sociologist Hugh McLeod writes that in medieval Christendom, "Christianity was a common language, shared by the devout, the lukewarm and even the secretly skeptical, through which a wide range of social needs could be met, and which provided generally accepted concepts

⁹² Eileen Power, "A Plea for the Middle Ages," *Economica* II (1922): 174, 177-180. Dawson also criticized the application of an Aristotelian concept of the state in the modern world: "Thus the greatest single cause of the breakdown of internationalism both in theory and in practice," Dawson wrote in 1942, "has been the failure to recognize the artificial and unstable character of the political unit on which all our schemes of international organization rest. The word *State* simply signifies an independent political organization, and does not tell us anything about the nature of the society that is organized. ... The clearest statement that I know of Catholic international principles—the Code of International Ethics prepared by the International union of Social Studies—while dealing exhaustively with the rights and duties of States, gives superficial attention to the fundamental sociological problem of the *nature* of the State. It accepts almost without modification the Aristotelian conception of the city State and applies it forthwith to the nation States of modern Europe; so that the Augustinian *Domus, Urbs, Orbis* is taken as an adequate classification of the social structure of the modern world." See: Christopher Dawson, *The Judgment of the Nations* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1942), 79-80, 81.

⁹³ These churchmen included Maurice B. Reckitt, A. J. Carlyle, Arthur J. Penty, G. K. Chesterton, and H. H. Slessor. Sir Henry Herman Slessor (1883-1979) was a judge and politician. Influenced by the Fabian Society as a young man, Slessor was appointed standing counsel to the Labour Party in 1912. However, he grew increasingly skeptical about the socialist policies advocated by the Labour Party, and preferred to draw on his Anglo-Catholicism for inspiration in social policy. During the year when *The Return of Christendom* appeared, "Slessor stood for parliament as Labour candidate for Central Leeds at the general election of November 1922 and put what he described as the principles of medieval economics, distributive and social justice, guilds, the condemnation of usury and avarice, and the just price in the forefront of his campaign." Slessor lost. He entered the Roman Catholic Church in 1946. Entry by S. M. Cretney, ODNB (accessed March 16, 2007).

⁹⁴ A Group of Churchmen, *The Return of Christendom* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1922), 9-13.

and symbols. These could be drawn upon by more or less everyone, especially in times of collective crisis, or in situations of personal danger or tragedy.”⁹⁵ Hence, a *return* of Christendom could—some thought—possibly heal the collective crisis of another age. Many writers during the 1920s (and on either side of that decade) held that Christendom had declined because of the loosening of ties between church and society ever since medieval times. They blamed the problems of industry on the individualism that had resulted from the decline of Christendom. For example, Maurice B. Reckitt (1884-1980), a leading Anglo-Catholic and Christian Socialist writer, penned for *The Return of Christendom* an essay called “The Idea of Christendom in Relation to Modern Society.” He defined Christendom as a “clear vision of a society in which the free activities of men are gathered together to create a social order which can be offered as a gift to the glory of God.”⁹⁶ Reckitt, influenced by Chesterton and A. R. Orage’s *New Age*, had founded the National Guilds Society in 1915 with the political theorist G. D. H. Cole (1889-1959). He later made the idea of Christendom the keystone to his work in Christian sociology during the 1930s and 1940s, and edited the quarterly journal of Christian sociology *Christendom* from 1931-1950.

Some Christian social thinkers forwarded the cause of Christendom while others worked for the causes of ethical socialism (such as L. T. Hobhouse and George Orwell) and Christian socialism (such as William Temple and R. H. Tawney).⁹⁷ Tawney used his scholarly interests in historical and political thought to address social problems and became an important influence on the rise of the British Labour Party. He became a reader in 1923 at the London School of Economics and built a reputation as the leading economic historian of his generation. *The Acquisitive Society* (1921) and *Equality* (1931) had great influence among socialists in Britain and abroad.

⁹⁵ Hugh and Werner Ustorf McLeod, eds., *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5, 11.

⁹⁶ Churchmen, *The Return of Christendom*, 38.

⁹⁷ Common factors in the radical tradition of ethical socialism in England have been described as commitment to fraternity, liberty, and equality—with emphasis on the latter; commitment to free will and the ability of men and women and society to aspire towards the rational realization of their best selves; commitment to the importance of a society’s past in shaping present institutions; and commitment to “sociological optimism” whereby moral character can improve the person and ennoble the nation. See Norman Dennis and A. H. Halsey, *English Ethical Socialism: Thomas More to R. H. Tawney* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 1, 5, 12. Ethical socialism and Christian socialism were less distinct traditions than different emphases—Tawney, for example, undertook his early research under Hobhouse at the London School of Economics (Dennis and Halsey, 2).

The point of *The Acquisitive Society* was that society should be based on *function*, not rights. A functional activity was one that embodied social purpose, and proprietary rights depended on performance of a service. Such a political philosophy, however, relied on society having a common mind, and it was the responsibility of the Christian churches to promote that common thinking.⁹⁸ The trouble was that the churches had retreated from social life. The abdication of one whole sphere of life by the Christian Churches was a revolution in the human spirit:

The mediaeval church, with all its extravagances and abuses, had asserted the whole compass of human interests to be the province of religion. The disposition to idealise it in the interests of some contemporary ecclesiastical or social propaganda is properly regarded with suspicion. But, though the practice of its offices was often odious, it cannot be denied that the essence of its moral teaching had been the attempt to uphold a rule of right, by which all aspects of human conduct were to be judged, and which was not merely to be preached as an ideal, but to be enforced as a practical obligation upon members of the Christian community.⁹⁹

Tawney directly linked his book to the experience of the Great War (which he had fought in) and industrial problems. “The havoc which the assertion of the right to unlimited economic expansion has made of the world of States needs no emphasis. Those who have lived from 1914-1921 will not ask why mankind has not progressed more swiftly; they will be inclined to wonder that it has progressed at all.”¹⁰⁰

Much of Tawney’s interest in social theory focused on the causal power of religious ideas, whether doctrinal or moral. This sociological interest in religion, similar to Dawson’s, was the basis of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926), perhaps the most popular and influential history book published between the wars.¹⁰¹ This book asked: how did a predominantly Christian nation break with the ethics of the medieval Church and the “organic society”¹⁰² to adopt the doctrine of *laissez-faire*? The answer was partly in the rise of new economic opportunities afforded by technology and New World markets, but the key factors lay in the realm of ideas—in morals and religion.¹⁰³ Through historical studies and more direct socialist writings

⁹⁸ R. H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1921), 9, 222, 227.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 231-232.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁰¹ Entry by Lawrence Goldman, ODNB (accessed 11 July 2009).

¹⁰² What was an “organic society”? Society in the Middle Ages, “like the human body, is an organism composed of different members. Each member has its own function, prayer, or defense, or merchandise, or tilling the soil.” R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Historical Study* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926), 23.

¹⁰³ Dennis and Halsey, *English Ethical Socialism: Thomas More to R. H. Tawney*, 187.

mentioned above, Tawney developed a social vision not uncritical of sociology itself.¹⁰⁴

Medievalism, the new Christendom, Christian socialism, the cure of social ills, and biological analogies—all these strands of early British sociology came together during the early and mid 1920s in *The Sociological Review*. George Sandeman,¹⁰⁵ in a long review of Patrick Geddes' *Town Planning towards City Development*¹⁰⁶ for the 1920 volume of *The Sociological Review*, quoted from Geddes: "Men are becoming disillusioned, through all towns and countries, of the ideas and activities which have brought about this climax of destruction. With all its industrial and imperial and financial greatness, they ask, what has been this industrial world after all?"¹⁰⁷ What was the answer? Both Sandeman and Geddes agreed: the answer was religious. They did not mean institutional religion, which had long since, they thought, lost its creative and regenerative spirit. Geddes and Sandeman had in mind a religion of the Ideal City, one that made a social difference. Sandeman quoted Geddes: "A religion is the best, the highest, the deepest, co-ordination of life, in thought and action, ideal and practice, which a community, in its age, can imagine and express, and thus so far attain. The Ideal City is one of the standard conceptions of past religions; why not also of reviving ones?"¹⁰⁸ Contrasting Roman cosmopolitanism with medieval regionalism, Geddes writes: "regions and cities in the middle ages widely returned to separate or inter-dependent life, and this varied and beautiful."¹⁰⁹ For Sandeman (interpreting Geddes), religion was not an "independent interest concerned with a

¹⁰⁴ R. H. Tawney, *Commonplace Book*, ed. J. M. and D. M. Joslin Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). September 18, 1912, Tawney wrote in this diary: "I am inclined to think that a great deal of thought and discussion which goes by the name of sociology has very little value so far as the improvement of human life is concerned, not because it is untrue, not because the problems with which it deals are unimportant, but because information—of a more or less speculative character, about the probable consequences and tendencies of human arrangements is, by itself, not very likely to make those arrangements better" (30).

¹⁰⁵ Most likely, this is Rear-Admiral Henry George Glas Sandeman (1868-1928); commanded HMS *Britannia*, European War; Commodore and Senior Naval Officer at Hong-Kong, 1916-1918; retired in 1918. See *WwW*, vol. II.

¹⁰⁶ Patrick Geddes, *Town Planning towards City Development*, 2 vols. (Indore: Holkar State Printing Press, 1918). These volumes were not published in Britain. However, Geddes' *Cities in Evolution: An Introduction to the Town Planning Movement and to the Study of Civics*, was published by Williams & Norgate of London in 1915.

¹⁰⁷ George Sandeman, "A Gardener of Paradise," review of *Town Planning towards City Development*, by Patrick Geddes, *Sociological Review* XII (1920): qtd. on 60. On p. 58, the editor noted that George Sandeman, in articles such as "Social Renewal," "Spirit Creative," and "The Community of Work" developed a single principle: that religion, life, and thought in respect of earthly affairs ought not be separated.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*: qtd. on 61.

¹⁰⁹ Geddes, *Town Planning towards City Development*, vol. 2: 179.

future life.” True religion organized the concrete details of life, from cities to labors to the arts. This coordinating work “belongs essentially and historically to the character of true religion. The medieval monastery is witness to this, and of this its cathedral is the monument.”¹¹⁰ For Sandeman, the medieval social ideal inspired the very rise of the discipline of sociology, for in an age of inhuman economics and inhuman factory towns, the master-science had arisen as a practical sociology devoted to the highest life-values. The development of sociology corresponded to an enlargement of moral vision, “For as countless inhuman separations of the most various kinds have characterized the age now shattered, so it is already certain that the inspiration of the coming era will be the reunion of separates into the unity of life.”¹¹¹ Sandeman wrote that Geddes’ mind was that of the Gardener, a biological mind constantly seeking to find “ever deeper interaction between the living form and its environment....” This biological mind saw a man “not as the abstract individual he may appear to be, and too often sets out to be, but as rooted in nature, in custom and tradition, in an occupation, in a family, in village or city, in a certain region....”¹¹²

In this book review, the themes of medievalism and biology reflected the key social problem that writers of the 1920s dealt with: how to regenerate society after the apparent failure of individualism and industry during the Great War. Geddes: “Everywhere, as I cannot too strongly repeat, throughout the changing world a new hope and purpose are appearing—of Reconstructive Peace, in its own way as strenuously organised as can be war, but now centred in and towards Life and Citizenship....”¹¹³ Essentially, this civic ideal was the medieval ideal. For example, responding to the outbreak of the Great War, the Sociological Society decided that the subjects of papers given to the Society should be as “far as practicable related to the social and international problems brought into prominence by the war.”¹¹⁴ S. H. Swinny, in his article “An Historical Interpretation of the War” discussed the common ways of life during medieval times and the importance for nations to stress that they together formed “but an element of a larger whole.”¹¹⁵ In 1920 appeared a report of the Cities Committee called “The War-Mind, The Business-Mind and a Third

¹¹⁰ Sandeman, “A Gardener of Paradise,” 62.

¹¹¹ Ibid.: 59.

¹¹² Ibid.: 60.

¹¹³ Geddes, *Town Planning towards City Development*, vol. 2: 189.

¹¹⁴ Sociological Society Report for 1914, *Sociological Review* VIII (1915): 207.

¹¹⁵ S. H. Swinny, “An Historical Interpretation of the War,” *Sociological Review* VIII (1915): 82, 91.

Alternative.” This article ended by appealing to the medieval world for the regeneration of the modern city:

Further, let it be recalled that coincident with the flowering of the mediæval guilds, there occurred the rise of the Universities and the coming of the Friars. Now think of the Universities and the Friaries at their constructive best in the thirteenth century. Conceive them as the wings of an organism, whose feet were the guilds, and body the natural autonomous city-region. ...And to-day that problem confronts the cities of our western world with an urgency intensified by the evils accumulated during all the years of failure to adjust the heritage of the historic past to contemporary and prospective needs through the intermediacy of modern resources. ...But long overdue is a new coming of Friars fully equipped in modern resources, yet cherishing the past and looking to the future. Their arrival will mark a real initiation into an era of Peacedom.”¹¹⁶

Indeed, some of the members of the Sociological Society saw themselves as Friars on a mission.¹¹⁷

Was sociological medievalism a form of nostalgia? Raymond Williams, in his *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, wrote of the relation between the immense economic and social changes in England between those years and the rise of the idea of *culture* in England as meaning a whole way of life.¹¹⁸ In other words, the very idea of culture (as a way of life) itself formed as a critique of the “bourgeois idea of society” as a neutral space where individuals were free to pursue their individual interests. This critique was a qualitative assessment, an articulation of an “organic whole” which had been divided by the forces of industrialism and individualism. Often, this social criticism involved finding images of the “organic” in a backward look: that was the basis of the rise of medievalism in the nineteenth century in Pugin and Ruskin and Morris.¹¹⁹ The backward look, the nostalgia or painful homesickness for the “organic community” passed from the nineteenth century to the interwar period. Contemporaries recognized this: Ernest Barker (Dawson’s mentor at Oxford) in 1921 distinguished between the “actual Middle Ages” and the “idealized Middle Ages” of William Morris, Hilaire Belloc, and G. K. Chesterton. The ideal “moves the mind and stirs the spirit of men, but the motion and the stirring are those not of the Middle Ages themselves, but rather of a certain antiquarian idealism—an inverted Utopianism, as it were, leading men to find the Utopia, or Nowhere, of the future in what one may call

¹¹⁶ Cities Committee, “The War-Mind, The Business-Mind and the Third Alternative,” *Sociological Review* XII (1920): 134-135.

¹¹⁷ S. K. Ratcliffe, “S. H. Swinny,” *Sociological Review* XV (1923).

¹¹⁸ Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, vii.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 140, 328.

a Never Was of the past.”¹²⁰ Williams agreed: the trouble with historical nostalgia is that the “organic community” is always gone. Each generation of social critics laments the passing of the community in the previous generation, which had also made the same criticism—and so on.¹²¹ By these standards, much of the sociological medievalism of the 1920s was nostalgic.

While Dawson shared the antipathy of sociological medievalism toward individualism and industrialism, to what extent was he influenced by this nostalgic discourse? Did he idealize the Middle Ages in his social criticism and his historiography? Though Dawson dwelt surprisingly little on the Middle Ages in his contemporary social criticism, some viewed his medieval historiography as overly idealized. In an otherwise positive review of *The Making of Europe* (1932), H. St. L. B. Moss (author of the 1935 work *The Birth of the Middle Ages: 395-814*), wrote in *History* [the quarterly journal of the Historical Association] that Dawson’s treatment of the medieval Papacy was too idealistic:

Statesmanlike Popes early perceived that moral influence was not to be had without physical sanctions, and few will agree with his [Dawson’s] view that the Papacy did not at times, during the period 700-900, aim at securing temporal power—a view which leads him (p. 264) to transfer the forgery of the Donation of Constantine from the eighth (its accepted date) to the ninth century, and to refuse it any political significance before 1050.¹²²

John Francis O’Doherty, in the pages of *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, reviewed *Mediaeval Religion* in 1934. He picked up on the Moss criticism as well, saying that Dawson failed to acknowledge the temporal elements in the aim of the reforms of the ecclesiastical authorities during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Furthermore, he completely disagreed with Dawson’s interpretation of William Langland’s fourteenth-century *Visions from Piers Plowman* poem. O’Doherty wrote: “Langland’s solution of the problem presented by the abuses of the fourteenth century is not, as Mr. Dawson claims, the Catholic one of reformation of the Church, but, as Dr. Coulton maintains, the essentially Protestant one of cutting adrift from the Church.”¹²³

O’Doherty here referred to the British medieval historian George Gordon Coulton (1858-1947). Coulton was one of the most learned medievalists of the generation

¹²⁰ F. J. C. Hearnshaw, ed., *Mediaeval Contributions to Modern Civilization* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1921). See Barker’s Preface, p. 6.

¹²¹ Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, 259-260. See also: William Stafford, “This Once Happy Country: Nostalgia for Pre-Modern Society,” in *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, ed. Christopher and Malcolm Chase Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).

¹²² H. St. L. B. Moss, review of *The Making of Europe*, *History* XVIII (1933): 252.

¹²³ John Francis O’Doherty, review of *Medieval Religion*, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* XLIV (1934): 554-555.

before Dawson. As a nominal Christian, he often attacked Catholic writers such as Cardinal Francis Gasquet (1846-1929) and G. K. Chesterton for the false image of the medieval age he believed that they presented in their writings. (Ironically, when Coulton moved to Cambridge in 1923 he lived on Chesterton Road—see his daughter's lively account of the man in *Father*.¹²⁴) Coulton heavily criticized Dawson's *Mediaeval Religion* in the pages of *The Cambridge Review*:

...We get the modern Roman Catholic culture of which Karl Adam and Jacques Maritain and Mr Dawson himself are representatives: a culture which catches at all that was most attractive, and much that was truest in medieval religion.... Whatever life this may have in itself, it does not historically represent the Middle Ages: it is (to quote Acton again) like a history of the French Revolution without the Guillotine.

He castigated Dawson for not treating of the Inquisition in his book, writing that “no historian who emphasizes the unity of religion and culture in the Middle Ages is justified in forgetting the price paid for whatever unity ever existed in fact.”¹²⁵ Coulton went on to publish the book *Inquisition and Liberty* in 1938. While it is true that “Inquisition” was not unique to medieval times (different movements lasted from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries) nor to the Catholic Church (it was used by the Spanish kingdom independently of the Pope), Dawson never saw himself as an ecclesiastical historian, and so perhaps avoided the topic because his interests lay elsewhere. Nevertheless, Coulton had a point, which Dawson did not seem to take to heart, for in his later book *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, he only mentioned the Inquisition in passing.

Hayden White, in a lengthy study of Dawson's historiography, accused him of upholding the Middle Ages as the “classical age” of the West and viewing decline or change from the ideal Catholic civilization of that time as the source of all modern difficulties. Dawson's interpretation seemed to arrest Western cultural development at its “highest” synthesis in the thought of Thomas Aquinas.¹²⁶

While Dawson may have treated some topics idealistically, his concern for the “synthesis” and “unity” of the Middle Ages was typical among Catholic medievalists during the early twentieth century. Medievalist Norman Cantor (1929-2004) wrote about the French historian of philosophy Etienne Gilson (1884-1978) and his

¹²⁴ Sarah Campion, *Father: A Portrait of G. G. Coulton at Home* (London: Michael Joseph, 1948).

¹²⁵ G. G. Coulton, “Mediaeval Religion,” review of *Medieval Religion*, *Cambridge Review* LVI (1934): 48.

¹²⁶ Hayden White, “Religion, Culture and Western Civilization in Christopher Dawson's Idea of History,” *English Miscellany* IX (1958): 272, 285. For a critique of White's interpretation of Dawson, see Russell Hittinger, “The Metahistorical Vision of Christopher Dawson,” in *The Dynamic Character of Christian Culture*, ed. Peter J. Cataldo (New York: University Press of America, 1984).

interpretation of medieval thought—as found, for example, in his Gifford Lectures at the University of Aberdeen for 1931-1932, published as *Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* (1936). Gilson had fought in the Great War and afterward shared with others of his day a “utopian desire for a cultural integration, social stability, and political consensus in European life....” He possessed that “integrationist vision of medieval culture” which attracted so many other Catholic intellectuals of his generation who believed that the Catholic Church was a “model for leadership in the unity of European culture.” Cantor placed Dawson in the same category.¹²⁷

Dawson’s unifying and synthesizing vision of medieval culture was seen in the final chapter to his *Making of Europe* (1932), which was called “The Rise of the Mediaeval Unity.” Dawson’s synthetic interpretation of the Middle Ages continued throughout his life; in *The Formation of Christendom* (1967) he included two chapters on “The Unity of Western Christendom” and “The Decline of Western Christendom.” However, he did write (*contra* White) that each “age” of Catholic culture since the time of Christ “has its own distinctive character and expresses a different facet of Christian culture. Yet none of them is final, so that we cannot say that a particular period, like the fourth or the thirteenth century, is the complete expression of Catholicism.”¹²⁸

It is true that as a boy Dawson read John Ruskin and William Morris,¹²⁹ and certain passages in his writings shared assumptions with medievalism. For example, in *Progress and Religion* (1929) Dawson wrote: “While the ancient Greeks, or the men of the Middle Ages, had used their poor resources to create artistic works as the material embodiment of their social and spiritual ideals, the men of the 19th century used their vast powers to build up the ugly, unhealthy, and disorderly cities of the industrial era, which seem devoid of form or of any common social purpose.”¹³⁰ In this passage Dawson’s social thinking shared in the perspective developed by

¹²⁷ Norman Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 329, 330.

¹²⁸ Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity* (1932; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 255; Christopher Dawson, *The Formation of Christendom* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), 15. As early as 1916 Dawson recognized that, “The Middle Ages give us, as it were, a rough sketch of what Christian society might be, but it did not live long enough to realise it.” Christopher Dawson, “The Catholic Tradition and the Modern State,” *Catholic Review* 1916, 26.

¹²⁹ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 34.

¹³⁰ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 218.

nineteenth-century medievalism which used the art of a period to judge the quality of the society producing it.¹³¹

Nevertheless, Dawson was aware of problems with the nostalgic interpretation of history. In the Introduction to his *The Making of Europe* (1932) he warned against two problematic tendencies in historical writing. Whig historians used the past in support of the modern age. However, there was the opposite danger of “using history as a weapon *against* the modern age, either on account of a romantic idealisation of the past, or in the interests of religious or national propaganda.” The danger of falsifying history in the interest of apologetics was particularly serious for the Catholic historian of the Middle Ages, Dawson wrote. That was so ever since the romantic revival first brought in the conception of the Middle Ages as the social expression of Catholic ideals. “In the past this was not so, and Catholic historians, like Fleury, often tended to err in the opposite direction by adopting the current prejudices of the post-Renaissance period against the ‘Gothic’ barbarism and ignorance of the Dark Ages.” He continued: “But for the last century and more there has certainly been a tendency among Catholic writers to make history a department of apologetics and to idealise mediæval culture in order to exalt their religious ideals. Actually this way of writing history defeats its own ends, since as soon as the reader becomes suspicious of the impartiality of the historian he discounts the truth of everything that he reads.”¹³²

Indeed, the Dominican priest Paul Foster, who met Dawson while studying at the Dominican House of Studies in Oxford during the 1940s, once asked Dawson if he planned a medieval sequel to *The Making of Europe*. “He replied,” Foster remembered, “decisively, No. Catholics were too obsessed with the Middle Ages and should devote their attention to modern influences—the French Revolution, for instance—which had contributed so much to the problems of the day.”¹³³

Despite some influence of medievalism on his perspectives, his medieval writings have held up well over the years¹³⁴ and he did not fundamentally share the nostalgic cast of mind. He was an historian concerned with the present, with the forces shaping the present, and with the emergence of new factors. He once wrote: “One might suppose, perhaps, that the historian would be more inclined than the journalist or the

¹³¹ Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, 131.

¹³² Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity*, 4, 5.

¹³³ Paul Foster, “The Making of Europe,” *The Chesterton Review* IX (May 1983): 141.

¹³⁴ See Alexander Murray’s Introduction to Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity*; Glenn W. Olsen, “The Changing Understanding of the Making of Europe from Christopher Dawson to Robert Bartlett,” *Quidditas* XX (1999).

man of affairs to judge the present situation in terms of the past. As a matter of fact, the case is just the reverse—it is only the trained mind that can recognize the new factors in a situation, the change of social direction which characterises a new period.”¹³⁵

He did not—at least in print—share the concern of Penty and Rickert for a so-called “Christian sociology.” Their sociology was highly medievalist in tone, such that it could be said that medievalism was a genre of sociology during the early twentieth century. But Dawson thought differently. Claude Locas concluded his study of the image of the Middle Ages in Dawson’s thought thus: “Si le moyen âge est privilégié ce n’est qu’en tant qu’il représente une instance particulière de l’histoire de la culture chrétienne”—and he quoted the following from Dawson: “Medieval Christendom is the outstanding example in history of the application of Faith to Life: the embodiment of religion in social institutions and external forms; and therefore both its achievements and its failures are worthy of study.”¹³⁶ Dawson took a sociological perspective on medieval history itself—sociology came first, as a method of trying to understand the many elements of medieval life and the functional role institutions such as monasticism played. He sought not to make easy sociological jibes against the present by citing medieval history, but first to understand what he called the *culture-process*:¹³⁷ how have cultures been formed? This was both an historical and a sociological question. He wanted to study the sociological role of religion in the formation of cultures—an interest that gave the formative period *before* the High Middle Age particular importance. Because he was interested in cultural formation he shifted traditional attention away from the High Middle Age of the thirteenth century—long celebrated by Catholics—to the neglected “Dark Ages” (AD 500-1000) which, he thought, were more sociologically interesting and important in the “making of Europe.” But how did Dawson coordinate this sociological study of religion with sociology as understood by Le Play and Geddes in biological terms?

Christopher Dawson’s “Sociological Imagination”

¹³⁵ Dawson, “European Democracy and the New Economic Forces,” 32.

¹³⁶ Claude Locas, “Le Moyen-Age dans la pensée historique de Christopher Dawson” (Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Montréal, 1970), 302; Dawson, *Medieval Essays*, 13.

¹³⁷ Christopher Dawson, *The Crisis of Western Education* (1961; Steubenville: Franciscan University of Steubenville Press, 1989), 137.

C. Wright Mills described a certain “sociological imagination” that commonly belongs to serious novelists.¹³⁸ This quality of mind joins hitherto isolated facts; it aids reflective people to access the ocean of information and form useful summaries and syntheses that can make sense of the world inside and outside of them. The sociological imagination is the “capacity to shift from one perspective to another—from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to comparative assessment of the national budgets of the world; from the theological school to the military establishment; from considerations of an oil industry to studies of contemporary poetry.”¹³⁹ To be aware of the idea of social structure and to use it with sensibility to understand linkages between personal milieux and those structures—that is to possess the sociological imagination.¹⁴⁰

Dawson’s “sociological imagination” was captivated by the Geddes-Le Play formula FWP (Folk-Work-Place) as representative of the fundamental social structures, the permanent foundations, of cultures; as a way to understand linkages between individual persons and those social structures; and as a way to correlate various perspectives of different disciplines of knowledge (see Appendix B). But this formula FWP had a crucial weakness. While its coordination of the material aspects of human life was widely accepted by those associated with *The Sociological Review*, Geddes’s account of the psychological side of life (as emergent out of biology) remained unconvincing.¹⁴¹ The problem was that the formula FWP failed to account effectively either for the role of ideas in social development or the *time* factor (biological or historical time). These were two other central elements needed for a more complete social science. As an evolutionary biologist, Geddes was fully aware of the role of time, but he could not capture it graphically in the FWP formula; nor was he an historian.

¹³⁸ Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 14.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5, 7.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 8, 10-11.

¹⁴¹ Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, *Biology* (London: Williams & Northgate, 1925), 223, 229, 231-232. Geddes’s attempt to relate biology and psychology was not utilized by other writers in the *Review*. In 1924 Mumford wrote to Dawson: “I myself have never made any intelligible advance with the squares [of Geddes’s graphical formula] devoted to sense-experience-feeling in their inter-relations....” (8 May 1924, STA, box 15, folder 58 “Mumford, Lewis.”)

Geddes tried to locate the principle of development in a mystical life-force.¹⁴² This did not satisfy the London School of sociology under L. T. Hobhouse, and the two groups split over this issue in 1910. For Hobhouse, sociology suffered from too close a relationship with biology. Any social science that tried to explain human institutions solely in terms of environment misunderstood the nature of social development, which is best understood in terms of human rationality. Sociology was essentially about the interaction of human minds, he wrote in 1924.¹⁴³ For Hobhouse, the environment did not determine social structure as though humanity was merely “wax to its seal.” The environment did not make the art and institutions of men; such phenomena proceeded from the energy and will. Rather, “the environment does go to determine the lines on which human energy can succeed, and so to decide what experiments and tentative beginnings will ripen into institutions.”¹⁴⁴ For Hobhouse and the ethical school of British sociology, any social science that tried to explain human beings and their institutions solely in terms of the natural environment, occupation, and family type (*Lieu, Travail, Famille* of Le Play) “had mistaken the nature of man’s evolution and misunderstood social development. Human institutions were best viewed as the products of rational thought and common purposes....”¹⁴⁵ For Hobhouse and the ethical sociologists, the civics sociology of Geddes and others denied the uniqueness of the human being. Such a fundamental disagreement eventually split the London (Hobhouse) and Edinburgh (Geddes) schools of sociology apart. Geddes’ synthesis was not as perfect as he had hoped.

However, Dawson’s major contribution to British sociology of the 1920s and 1930s was just such a synthesis, or at least attempted synthesis, of London and Edinburgh perspectives. He proposed holding both biology *and* ideas together in a kind of dualism or vital union “like that of the human organism.”¹⁴⁶ He wrote elsewhere: “the intellectual element in culture is consubstantial with its material substratum, in the same way that the mind of the individual is consubstantial with his body. But just as

¹⁴² Ibid., 236; Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 314. Geddes corresponded with the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941), famous for his theories of “emergent evolution.”

¹⁴³ L. T. Hobhouse, *Social Development: Its Nature and Conditions* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1924), 7, 11; Halliday, “The Sociological Movement, the Sociological Society and the Genesis of Academic Sociology in Britain,” 386-387.

¹⁴⁴ Hobhouse, *Social Development: Its Nature and Conditions*, 7.

¹⁴⁵ Halliday, “The Sociological Movement, the Sociological Society and the Genesis of Academic Sociology in Britain,” 386, 387.

¹⁴⁶ Dawson, “Sociology as a Science,” 33.

the individual mind infuses the body, so too is the intellectual element the soul and the formative principle of a culture.”¹⁴⁷ Such reflections on the human person as body and mind/soul lay at the beginning and the center of his thought about history and culture. He began everything from the standpoint of a particular understanding of the *human person*. This was literally true: besides his 1920 article in *The Sociological Review*, the other significant piece he published at the beginning of his writing career was called, “The Nature and Destiny of Man.”¹⁴⁸

Thus, Dawson effectively modified the Geddes formula to read: I/FWP, “I” representing the intellectual element (see Appendix C). In the Introduction to his first book, *The Age of the Gods* (1928), he wrote that while the three main elements which form and modify human culture are biological, there existed a fourth element—“thought or the psychological factor—which is peculiar to the human species and the existence of which frees man from the blind dependence on material environment which characterises the lower forms of life.”¹⁴⁹ He went on in that book to apply this conception of culture to, for example, the great temple states of the archaic culture of Western Asia. Those states were, at once, centers of communal life (F), economic life (W), and intellectual life (I) in relation to particular geographical conditions (P), such as the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. For Dawson, the intellect “is the active and creative element in culture, since it emancipates man from the purely biological laws which govern the development of animal species, and enables him to accumulate a growing capital of knowledge and social experience, which gives him a progressive control over his material environment.”¹⁵⁰ The most vital changes in human life came from within, and thus the greatest agent of progress was the human mind, he thought.

Through his studies of anthropology, Dawson expanded the conception of mind to include the whole domain of human consciousness. *Thought* and *religion* were born together in the mists of the past, and the most important persons in primitive societies were those held to be closest to the supernatural. Though wars and new technologies had brought great changes in human life, a change in religious vision could be the

¹⁴⁷ ———, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 67.

¹⁴⁸ Christopher Dawson, “The Nature and Destiny of Man,” in *Enquiries into Religion and Culture*, by Christopher Dawson (London: Sheed & Ward, 1933). First published in *God and the Supernatural*, Fr. Cuthbert, O.F.S.C., ed. (London: Longmans Green).

¹⁴⁹ Dawson, *The Age of the Gods: A Study in the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient East*, xiv.

¹⁵⁰ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 67.

greatest agent of human progress because the religious impulse ultimately lay behind cultural unity and identity.¹⁵¹

He wrote in 1934 that, “In order to understand the religion of such an age [the medieval], it is not enough to study it theologically in its essential dogmas and religious principles; it is also necessary to study it sociologically with reference to the changing complex of social traditions and cultural institutions into which it became incorporated. The social form of a religion depends not only on the inner logic of its moral doctrine but on the type of culture with which it is united, and so also on the way in which its union with the culture is achieved.”¹⁵²

In this way Dawson maintained a precarious position on the borders between sociology and theology. Within the Sociological Society, religion held an ambiguous place. In a letter to Dawson toward the end of his life, Geddes wrote: “I’ve long had contacts with highly religious people...enough to feel something at least of religious values, & this need of them; but have written little—not ready to!”¹⁵³ Sadly, after the death of his son on the Western Front and his wife in 1917, Geddes’s formula FWP became a kind of obsession for him (an “agnostic substitute for prayer,” according to Mumford), especially as he constantly tried to rework it and extend it in new directions.¹⁵⁴ In the case of Branford, Dawson wrote a tribute to him after his death: “By the death of Victor Branford the cause of Sociology in England has lost its most devoted servant.” He commented that Branford was the last representative of the great nineteenth-century idealists like J. H. Bridges (1832-1906) who “lived for the things of the spirit” and in whom “Branford’s life-long ideal of the union of Science and Sanctity found its realisation.” Dawson judged that Branford was “of the race of the prophets” whose greatest strength was “sensitiveness to every vital spiritual current in the life of society.”¹⁵⁵ Branford was someone who “saw the vocation of sociology in Comtean terms, as an aspiration for a social science that could contribute to social reconstruction in pursuit of the common good...[and of] mobilising human energies in the pursuit of ideals.”¹⁵⁶ Though he never made an explicit statement of religious

¹⁵¹ Dawson, *The Age of the Gods: A Study in the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient East*, xiv, xx; Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 68-70, 83.

¹⁵² Dawson, *Medieval Essays*, 50-51.

¹⁵³ Geddes to Dawson, 4 August 1930, STA, box 15, folder 135, p. 3.

¹⁵⁴ This was Lewis Mumford’s critique; see “The Geddesian Gambit” (appendix 3) in Novak, ed., *Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes: The Correspondence*, 363, 365-366.

¹⁵⁵ Christopher Dawson, “He Gave....His Whole Self,” *Sociological Review* XXIV (1932): 24.

¹⁵⁶ John Scott and Christopher T. Husbans, “Victor Branford and the Building of British Sociology,” *Sociological Review* LV (2007): 471.

belief, he was not hostile to religion. His wife Sybella was a Christian, the daughter of an Anglican priest. Furthermore, Victor's first book was a biography of St. Columba.¹⁵⁷

Thus there was little hostility among the group to Dawson's emphasis on religion and the need for theology and sociology to coordinate themselves in relation to each other. He saw this as of strategic importance for Catholics, especially, as when in notes for a 1934 lecture he typed: "Need for Catholic study of sociology, since the main assault on Christianity has based itself on sociological theories (Rousseau, Comte, Marx and others)."¹⁵⁸ Though one could argue that G. K. Chesterton was often a kind of unscientific but witty sociologist, Dawson's emphasis on the importance of sociology was an unusual perspective among Catholic thinkers of the day, who distinguished themselves in literature (Charles Péguy, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Hilaire Belloc, J. R. R. Tolkien), philosophy (Jacques Maritain), and theology (Henri de Lubac), but not in sociology.¹⁵⁹

The relationship between sociology and religion was a central theme in two of Dawson's 1934 publications: a paper read at the International Sociological Congress at Geneva¹⁶⁰ and a chapter for a book examining the different branches of contemporary science.¹⁶¹ If a culture, for Dawson, was not merely a community or work and a community of place, but above all a community of thought, then the "problem of sociology" was fundamentally one of "intellectual jurisdiction," of coordinating the study of both material factors *and* religious, intellectual, and artistic factors. The great temptation for the sociologist had always been to confuse sociology with other disciplines. "Thus the efforts of the Encyclopaedists, the St. Simonians and the Positivists result in the creation of a theory of society which was at the same time a philosophy of history, a system of moral philosophy and a non-theological substitute for religion." More recent sociologists, such as L. T. Hobhouse, had confused their discipline with ethical idealism or else with the hard sciences. While it was true that a

¹⁵⁷ Victor Branford, *St. Columba: A Study of Social Inheritance and Spiritual Development* (Edinburgh: Patrick Geddes & Colleagues, 1912).

¹⁵⁸ Synopsis of Paper to be read by Mr. Christopher Dawson at the Linnean Society's Hall on June 19th at 8 p.m. on "The Place of Sociology in Catholic Thought." KA-AF, folder "Dawson, C. Lectures and Letters."

¹⁵⁹ Russell Hittinger, "Christopher Dawson: A View from the Social Sciences," in *The Catholic Writer*, ed. Ralph McInerney (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 31, 32.

¹⁶⁰ Dawson, "Prevision in Religion." Dawson was not actually able to attend the October 1933 conference, perhaps because around that time he was moving his family from Devon to Hatlington Hall in Yorkshire. Apparently someone else read the paper for him.

¹⁶¹ ———, "Sociology as a Science."

certain “biological” method was central to sociology, as Le Play had shown, it was impossible to explain society by reference to material factors alone. Religion and thought, studied by theology and philosophy as ends in themselves, were also important. True, spiritual and intellectual realities had to be interpreted from within the social environment, but also *from their own viewpoint*, not simply as derivatives of something else. “The intrusion of these qualitatively distinct categories or orders of being into the sociological field is a great stumbling-block in the social sciences.” He continued: “The natural scientist has a completely homogeneous material in the material phenomena that he investigates; so also has the philosopher in the region of ideas; but the sociologist has to deal impartially with material and spiritual factors, with things and ideas, with moral and economic values, with all the multifarious experience of the two-sided nature of man.”¹⁶²

If the sociologist needed to respect religion, philosophy, and science as possessing their own ends, as not mere functions of society, so too the philosopher and theologian had to respect the contributions of sociologists. That was because, “We cannot understand an idea unless we understand its historical and social foundations.” Theologians had consistently failed to recognize the social and economic elements in religious phenomena. “Most of the great schisms and heresies in the history of the Christian church,” he wrote, “have their roots in social or national antipathies, and if this had been clearly recognized by the theologians the history of Christianity would have been a very different one.”¹⁶³ In this way, sociologists and theologians needed to acknowledge the limitations of their disciplines.

In the case of historians, Dawson meant something very simple by sociology:

One adopts the sociological point of view when he takes institutions, and the processes by which they are built and eventually decay, as a subject for inquiry antecedent to a detailed study of the intellectual and aesthetic artifacts of those institutions. More simply put, and to take one of Dawson’s own examples, one should first understand the institution and culture of monasticism and then turn to monastic philosophy, illuminated manuscripts, and the other artifacts of the institution.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² ———, “Sociology as a Science,” 16, 24, 25.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 28, 31, 32.

¹⁶⁴ Hittinger, “Christopher Dawson: A View from the Social Sciences,” 34-35. When proposing his educational curriculum for Catholic colleges, Dawson wrote: “What is needed, so it seems to me, is a study of Christian culture as a social reality—its origins, development and achievements—for this would provide a background of framework that would integrate the liberal studies which at present are apt to disintegrate into unrelated specialisms.” He continued: “This kind of program is not simply a study of the Christian classics; nor is it primarily a literary study. It is a cultural study in the sociological and historical sense, and it would devote more attention to the social institutions and the moral values of Christian culture than to its literary and artistic achievements.” See Dawson, *The Crisis of Western Education*, 137.

This chapter has shown that, though not unaffected by the nostalgic medievalism of his time, Dawson emphasized the need for social thinkers to approach their subject from a truly scientific perspective focused on the relations among human beings and the relation between people and their environment. Inspired by his friends at *The Sociological Review*, he first worked out a sociological position during the 1920s and then turned to publish on the Middle Ages in the early 1930s. He showed how the formation of medieval culture (AD 500-1000) possessed tremendous sociological value as an example of the culture-process by which a new culture arises in response to religious, economic, social, and geographical influences.

For Dawson, Folkways, Workways, and Placeways were fundamental structures in a particular culture studied in relation to the Religionways and Thoughtways of that culture. These were the primary relations of human beings to each other and to the natural world which always persisted underneath their changing shapes in different times and places in world history. One could not be reduced to another, and all attempts to explain cultural development as a product of only one factor distorted the real complexity of such development.

In this way, Dawson was more a “sociographer” than a sociologist.¹⁶⁵ He was a sociologist in the classical tradition of Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Max Weber (1864-1920) who worked on the border of such disciplines as history, cultural anthropology, and philosophy—though he differed from them in that he clearly made value judgments upon his contemporary world. Nevertheless, these classical figures were concerned with the “salient characteristics of their time,” the “nature of human nature,”¹⁶⁶ and the problem of religion and modernity, as was Dawson. One salient characteristic of their time was the whole question of cultural development or human progress, and hence the *time* factor, the diachronic element left out of the Geddes-Le Play formula. One student of Dawson’s thought wrote that: “La religion, dans la conception de l’histoire de Dawson, représente donc la superstructure du mouvement de l’histoire, et la sociologie, c’est-à-dire les conditions matérielles de la culture, l’infrastructure qui, en tant que telle, soutient tout l’édifice culturel et l’enracine.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ John Lukacs made this distinction: “sociological”: scientific, pretending to be *definitive*; “sociographical”: *descriptive*, with an appeal to our retrospective and imaginative understanding. See John Lukacs, *At the End of an Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 65, fn 13.

¹⁶⁶ Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 165.

¹⁶⁷ Locas, “Le Moyen-Age dans la pensée historique de Christopher Dawson”, 172.

As an historian with a sociological imagination, Dawson turned to study the “mouvement de l’histoire” and the idea of “Progress.”

CHAPTER THREE

The Question of Human Progress¹

*“Progress! Did you ever reflect that that word is almost a new one?
No word comes more often or more naturally to the lips of modern man, as if the thing it stands
for were almost synonymous with life itself....*

~

*“ The procession is under way. The stand-patter doesn’t know there is a procession.
He is asleep in the back part of his house. He doesn’t know that the road is resounding with the
tramp of men going to the front.”—Woodrow Wilson, 1913²*

*“What but the idea of Progress lies at the back of Education
policy and Eugenics and our talk about the betterment of humanity? How many hundreds of
thousands volunteered to fight in the War in
order that war should be no more?” —A. F. Pollard, 1923³*

How did the Great War (1914-1918) affect Western thought and culture? This question has motivated a growing amount of scholarship. Paul Fussell’s classic *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) viewed the war as a unique moment of discontinuity in the development of modern consciousness—the fracturing of a prewar world of innocent belief in Progress⁴ that never doubted the benignity even of technology because the word *machine* was not yet linked in the popular mind with the word *gun*. Much recent scholarship has gone beyond Fussell’s literary source-base and added nuance to his emphasis on discontinuity between the pre- and post-war

¹ A much shorter version of this chapter was recently published; see Joseph T. Stuart, "The Question of Human Progress in Britain after the Great War," *British Scholar* 1 (2008).

² Woodrow Wilson, *The New Freedom* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1913), 42, 53. Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), President of the United States (1913-1921); this book was arranged by William Bayard Hale from Wilson’s 1912 campaign speeches. Hale (1869-1924) was an Episcopalian minister turned journalist. Through connections he was chosen to write Wilson’s campaign biography, *The New Freedom*. However, in 1915 he wrote against the British blockade of Germany and after the US entered the war against Germany he was denounced. Hale went into European exile and wrote *The Story of a Style* (1920) attacking Wilson’s intelligence by using examples of the President’s writing as evidence.

³ A. F. Pollard, "History and Progress," *History* VIII (1923): 85. Albert Frederick Pollard (1869-1948); historian (e.g., *Wolsey*, 1929) and founder and director of the Institute of Historical Research (1921).

⁴ In this chapter, "Progress" (capital "P") refers to the *idea* of progress, to the modern belief in the ideology of progress; "progress" (small "p") refers to the *fact*—if it is a fact—of progress. For two helpful and brief introductions to the topic of "progress," see Morris Ginsberg, "Progress in the Modern Era," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Philip P. Weiner (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973); Jerry Weinberger, "Progress, Idea of," in *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Maryanne Cline Horowitz (New York: Thomson Gale, 2004).

worlds.⁵ These scholars examine the war and look forward in time; others study the war and look backwards. For example, Robert Wohl emphasizes that the idea of a “unique generation” of 1914 possessed strong roots in the turbulent decade *before* the war.⁶ Jay Winter and Stefan Goebel also emphasize the continuity of pre- and post-war mentalities, especially in the traditional vocabularies of mourning derived from classical, romantic, and religious forms that were adopted after the Great War.⁷

This continuity also appeared in the new derivative senses of the word “progress” proliferating in British business and manufacturing language of the war and post-war years: “progress committee” (from 1914), “progress clerk” (1921—a person who pushed forward work through various stages until it was ready for delivery), “progress department” (1925), “progress manager” (1925), and “progress report” (1929).⁸ New technologies spread rapidly, such as the radio, cinema, and automobile, confirming this understanding of progress after the war. The thesis of this chapter is that during and after the Great War there survived in Britain a strong belief in Progress as historical fact and hope in Progress as an ideal of social reconstruction. However, the argument continues, Christopher Dawson offered an historical critique of this idea in his *Progress and Religion* (1929). Firm and largely unquestioned support for the idea of Progress filled the books of Joseph McCabe, L. T. Hobhouse, F. S. Marvin, H. G. Wells, and J. B. Bury—all of whom tried to influence the sphere of public reason by writing directly on the idea of Progress or incorporating a largely implicit

⁵ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 24, 169; Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (London: Papermac, 1989); Modris Eksteins, “The Cultural Legacy of the Great War,” in *The Great War and the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jay Winter, Geoffrey Parker, and Mary R. Habeck (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000); Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Pimlico, 1990); Frank Field, *British and French Writers of the First World War: Comparative Studies in Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁶ Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980).

⁷ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 7, 8, 223. See also: Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Rosa Maria Bracco challenges the idea of a “modern” memory generated by the war to emphasize the reaffirmation of continuity in her study of middlebrow writers: Rosa Maria Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Providence & Oxford: Berg, 1993). The historiography of continuity reaches back at least to George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London: Constable, 1936). Dangerfield: “The War hastened everything—in politics, in economics, in behaviour—but it started nothing” (viii). Discontinuity interpretations of the Great War typically result in periodizations of twentieth-century British history that begin with the Great War, as in Kenneth O. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Continuity interpretations periodize from an earlier date, as in Keith Robbins, ed., *The British Isles 1901-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁸ OED, “progress,” *sb.*, sense 7 (accessed 15 March 2008).

understanding of it into their views on history and society. For them, “Progress” was the general idea that “civilization has moved, is moving, and will move in a desirable direction.”⁹ To none of these members of the older generation born in the 1860s did the war make a significant difference for their fundamental assumptions about the question of progress. Traditional religions, they thought or implied, impeded human progress, which is secured by the spread of reason and science. I refer in this chapter to these individuals as “survival-of-hope” thinkers because in the 1920s they continued to stress a largely unmodified belief in Progress. The first part of this chapter is an exposition of their writings. While others could undoubtedly be added to this survival-of-hope group,¹⁰ only these five will be studied because of their clear attention to the question of progress.

How was “progress” even a question at all? While for some people during the 1920s life was full of fast cars, parties, and sex (as analyzed in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* of 1925 and satirized in Evelyn Waugh’s *Vile Bodies* of 1930), below this surface thoughtful writers sensed a heightened pessimism.¹¹ John Maynard Keynes wrote his international bestseller *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* in 1919 and painted a dark picture: “I have criticised the work of Paris [on the Treaty of Versailles], and have depicted in sombre colours the condition and the prospects of Europe. ...Modern society is not immune from the very greatest evils.”¹² In his 1920 Romanes Lecture, W. R. Inge, dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral, condemned the idea of Progress as a “superstition.”¹³ Oswald Spengler’s two-volume *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* appeared in Germany (1918-1923), and later in Britain (1926-1929) as *The Decline of the West*. In 1931 the idea of organizing historical narratives around “the workings of an obvious principle of progress” was exposed as a “mental trick” in

⁹ J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth* (London: Macmillan, 1920), 2.

¹⁰ Such as, for example, Bertrand Russell; see Ross Aldridge, “*The Great War and the Historical Imagination: European Intellectuals and the Meaning of the Past, c. 1914-1937*” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Reading, 2003), 91.

¹¹ Pessimism already had strong roots in the West by the late nineteenth century; see Georg G. Iggers, “The Idea of Progress: A Critical Reassessment,” *American Historical Review* LXXI (1965): 1, 5. For the interwar years, see Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009).

¹² John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1919), 236, 237.

¹³ W. R. Inge, “The Idea of Progress,” in *Outspoken Essays* (London: Longmans, Green, 1922), 163. Morris Ginsberg, L. T. Hobhouse’s successor (1929) in the Martin White chair of sociology at the London School of Economics, also expressed pessimism in Morris Ginsberg, “The Theory of Progress,” *Economica* I & II, no. 6 (1921-1922). However, A. F. Pollard attacked Inge in Pollard, “History and Progress.”

Herbert Butterfield's *The Whig Interpretation of History*.¹⁴ Perhaps the literary influences of the war are best-known, as in T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," which was published in 1922 and captured an important element of "disenchantment."¹⁵ By the late 1920s, when Dawson's *Progress and Religion* appeared, this "literature of disillusion" flourished, arising out of the perceived collision between the events of the war and the public language and ideas (of the older generation) available to understand and portray those events.¹⁶ Dawson's book was part of this larger movement of cultural self-critique.

In 1923 a course of six lectures was organized by the Fabian Society to be given in London by Bertrand Russell, R. H. Tawney, Bernard Shaw, and others, called: "Is Civilisation Decaying?"¹⁷ Some people were at least asking this question. Did no one in Britain critically examine the idea of Progress with an adequate account of civilizational decay in hand?¹⁸ Christopher Dawson did. The second part of this

¹⁴ H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1931), 12.

¹⁵ Arthur Marwick, *A History of the Modern British Isles, 1914-1999* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 118; Kenneth O. Morgan, "The Twentieth Century (1914-2000)," in *The Oxford History of Britain*, ed. Kenneth O. Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 600. See also: C. E. Montague, *Disenchantment* (1922; London: Chatto & Windus, 1928). However, Montague did not belong to the school of "disenchanted" writers of the late 1920s such as Robert Graves; rather, he possibly occupied a peripheral position in his response to the Great War in 1922; see Keith Grieves, "C. E. Montague and the Making of *Disenchantment*, 1914-1921," *War in History* IV (1997).

¹⁶ Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 169. On Fussell, see, for example: Leonard V. Smith, "Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*: Twenty-five Years Later," *History and Theory* XL (2001). The young generation of disillusionment writers were Dawson's own generation: Wilfred Owen (b. 1893), David Jones (b. 1895), Siegfried Sassoon (b. 1886), Robert Graves (b. 1895), Ernest Hemingway (b. 1899), e. e. cummings (b. 1894), Edmund Blunden (b. 1896), and Erich Maria Remarque (b. 1898). In 1928 appeared Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* and Blunden's *Undertone's of War*. The year 1929 saw published Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Graves's *Goodbye to All That*, and the English translation of Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, first published as *Im Westen nichts Neues* at the end of 1928. Effects of the war on the literature of the older generation, some of whom, such as H. G. Wells (b. 1866) and Rudyard Kipling (b. 1865), yielded to the temptation to wield power through their gifts as writers during the war, are described in Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: British, American, and Canadian Propaganda and Fiction, 1914-1933* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), chapter 12.

¹⁷ *Is Civilisation Decaying?*, (1923). Fabian Society Syllabus. The others were: Sidney Webb, H. J. Laski, and John Ervine. Webb ended his lecture: "The new spirit by which civilisation may be saved is the conception of Life for Social Service, instead of Life for Private Gain. 'Not strong enough,' you say. In that case one more civilisation will be added to the list of the lost" (2). I do not mean to imply that all of these men were pessimists or that they had no political or ideological agendas behind their lectures—just that the question of the series title was, in fact, *asked*, and was obviously expected to draw an audience.

¹⁸ For a survey of postwar conceptions of progress and historical continuity in Western culture as a whole, but especially in Germany, see Eksteins, "The Cultural Legacy of the Great War." In Ekstein's view, the war was a decisive event in a turn toward cultural pessimism. Discussion in Germany surrounded the extremely pessimistic two-volume work of Oswald Spengler *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918-1923). In the United States, there was definitely a crisis concerning the idea of Progress among intellectuals—see Clarke A. Chambers, "The Belief in Progress in Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of the History of Ideas* XIX (1958).

chapter will contrast perspectives in J. B. Bury's *The Idea of Progress* (1920) with those in Dawson's *Progress and Religion* (1929) in order to highlight discontinuity in the perceptions of progress after the Great War. I will show that Dawson—a younger man than Bury and the other survival-of-hope thinkers—came to intellectual maturity during and after the Great War and subjected the idea of Progress to a severe but constructive critique. While avoiding the extremes of cyclical pessimism and linear optimism, Christopher Dawson combined environmentalism and concern for the aesthetics and social health of the human landscape with unique perspectives on the historical role of religion in the question of progress. He communicated a highly original account of human progress for its time by critiquing understandings of science, religion, and progress like those found in the survival-of-hope thinkers. Before examining those thinkers, it is necessary to briefly outline preliminary theoretical considerations.

Preliminary Theoretical Considerations of the Idea of Progress

Historian G. M. Trevelyan once wrote that, “The answer that we each give to the question whether there has been progress or deterioration depends on what things each of us values most. Progress may be judged by purely material standards, by moral, by intellectual, or by artistic standards. The world has seldom or never progressed in all these ways at the same time, and there will never be agreement as to what constitutes progress or deterioration in morals, in intellect or in art. Talk about progress in the vague is therefore of little value. One must define the terms of the enquiry.”¹⁹ Definition of terms, then, is of first priority. I use the word “define” not as it is used in the sciences, in which definitions can define absolutely. For this chapter, definition is a matter of degree, of making clearer something already partly understood. In this sense, the present chapter is one long essay in definition (see R. G. Collingwood's insights on the problem of definition²⁰).

What *is* the idea of Progress? While there is no agreement on the answer to this question, most commentators agree on a general definition (in Bury's words): the idea of Progress is the belief that “civilisation has moved, is moving, and will move in a

¹⁹ G. M. Trevelyan, “Macaulay and the Sense of Optimism,” in *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians: An Historic Revaluation of the Victorian Age* (Foreword by Harman Grisewood, London: Sylvan, 1949), 52.

²⁰ R. G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933), 94.

desirable direction.”²¹ Furthermore, there are several broad categories of thought and one important distinction associated with the concept of progress.

Categories: Content, Subject, Agency, Movement. Drawing from the helpful analysis of W. Warren Wagar,²² there are several aspects to the vague concept of progress: A. What is the content of progress? In other words, how is “progress” different from simple change? In what direction does progress lie?—knowledge? reasoning? material wealth? social unity and health? government? arts? justice? freedom? spirituality? In order for progress to be real, there must be an ideal, an end toward which movement occurs.

B. What is the subject of progress? Who or what is considered to be progressing?—the cosmos? biological life on earth? human life on earth? a single race or region or civilization? the individual? society?

C. What is the agency of progress? What causes progress?—God or gods? religion? the laws of history or nature? social effort? great human individuals? institutions? or some combination of these?

D. What is the movement of progress? Is it inevitable or conditional? How does it move?—is it rectilinear? spiral-form? or discontinuous?

Distinction: Fact and Idea: When writing of progress, one must distinguish between *progress as fact* and the *idea of Progress*. A history of progress is a very different thing than a history of the belief in Progress—an important distinction made by John Baillie. Baillie wrote: “It is possible that men have progressed without knowing it, or again that they believed they were progressing when in fact they were not.”²³ Nevertheless, Baillie continued, progress as fact and the idea of Progress are not hermetic categories exclusive of mutual influence. The fact can support the idea, and the idea can be a cause of further facts. Furthermore, this distinction between fact and idea is the foundation of a distinction between *progress as empirically observed* (fact) and *progress as a quasi-religious faith* (idea or belief). The first largely

²¹ Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, 2. See also: Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry* (1929; Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 16; W. Warren Wagar, *Good Tidings: The Belief in Progress from Darwin to Marcuse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 4; Morris Ginsberg, *The Idea of Progress: A Revaluation* (London: Methuen, 1953), 3. G. K. Chesterton put it humorously like this: in contrast with the Dark Ages full of the notion of “A Good Time Going,” “The whole culture of our time has been full of the notion of ‘A Good Time Coming.’” See G. K. Chesterton, *A Short History of England* (1917; London: Chatto & Windus, 1924), 21.

²² Wagar, *Good Tidings: The Belief in Progress from Darwin to Marcuse*, 4-5.

²³ John Baillie, *The Belief in Progress* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 4.

concerns the past and the technical aspects of human life, while the second refers to the future and often to a broader and vaguer sense of human perfectibility or at least improvement in human moral and spiritual nature. Baillie's subtle distinction is often confused because "progress" usually refers to both a "synthesis of the past and a prophecy of the future," combining fact and belief in one vague idea.²⁴

Survival of Hope: Conceptions of Progress in the 1920s

All of the writers considered in this chapter (including Dawson) agreed on the centrality of science to human progress. This was the main emphasis of the first writer at hand: Joseph McCabe (1867-1955). McCabe, a former Franciscan friar turned celebrity rationalist, wrote over two hundred books and monographs, thousands of articles, and gave thousands of lectures all over the English-speaking world popularizing "free-thought" and his belief that the combination of freedom, reason, and science would lead to a new era of peace and prosperity. Born in Cheshire to poor but respectable Roman Catholic parents, he attended a Catholic elementary school until age thirteen in Manchester, where his family had relocated. He trained as a Franciscan friar, received ordination into the priesthood, studied at Louvain University, and then taught philosophy. In 1895 he became rector of St. Bernardine's College, Buckingham, "but in 1896 his growing doubts led him to abandon his post, his order, his church, and his religion."²⁵ McCabe called himself an agnostic and rationalist²⁶ (later, an atheist and materialist). The agnostic Leslie Stephen, first editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, befriended McCabe and helped get his *Twelve Years in a Monastery* (1897) published. For the rest of his life McCabe worked as a freelance writer and speaker, becoming the most industrious and influential leader of the free-thought movement in the English-speaking world. McCabe was one of the founders of the Rationalist Press Association (1899) and

²⁴ Ibid., 39-40; Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, 5.

²⁵ ODNB, entry by Nicolas Walter. McCabe was not just a critic; for example, see his final chapter called "The Gospel of Man" in Joseph McCabe, *The Bankruptcy of Religion* (London: Watts, 1917). Here one gets a sense of his new faith: "Sweep these ancient legends out of your schools and colleges, your army and navy, your code of law, your legislative houses, and substitute for them a spirit of progress, efficiency, boldness, and candour!" (p. 296).

²⁶ "Rationalism" is the philosophical view that holds reason as the chief source and test of knowledge; it is based on the belief that the world is a rationally ordered whole, "the parts of which are linked by logical necessity and the structure of which is therefore intelligible." Furthermore, rationalism ascribes to a class of truths that the mind can grasp directly, prior to experience, or *a priori*, making this system of thought the long-time rival of empiricism. Against revealed religion, rationalism places the human mind as the highest authority. See *Britannica Macropædia* (2002), "Philosophical Schools and Doctrines, Western," pp. 640, 641.

served as a director until 1902. Though he never claimed to be a scholar, McCabe mastered many languages and disciplines, and had an unrivaled ability to explain complex ideas in simple terms. The final chapter of Bill Cooke's biography of McCabe is called, "A Twentieth-Century Diderot"; indeed, he was widely recognized as the foremost British opponent of religion in the first half of the twentieth century.²⁷

In McCabe's book *1825-1925: A Century of Stupendous Progress*, the author combated what he identified as *pessimism*: "...There has never been since the early Middle Ages so extensive and mournful a prediction of evil as we hear in Europe today. Scientists and sociologists, literary men and business men, statesmen and churchmen and noblemen, unite in telling us that we are in decay and that the pit yawns before us."²⁸ McCabe attempted to use facts and history to expose this pessimism as a fraud. He noted that the rhetoric of the sad sociologists, literary figures, and churchmen continually used words such as "degeneration" and "demoralization" without realizing that such words imply comparison with an earlier historical age.²⁹ McCabe argued that:

They have, in fact, as a rule, no definite term of comparison in their minds when they use such comparative expressions as that we are degenerating, becoming demoralized, or falling into decay. ...From what level do they suppose that we are falling? Which is the generation with less violence, less injustice, less political dishonesty, less adultery even, than ours? We smile when Mr. Chesterton, with the audacity of innocence, names the Middle Ages! Dean Inge hesitatingly mentions the early Victorians; and presently we shall smile hardly less over this.³⁰

McCabe adopted the comparative method of the "pessimists" and used it against them. Comparing the British world of 1825 to that of 1925, McCabe advanced two theses: "The first is not only are we 'better than our fathers,' but *there has in the last one hundred years been more progress in every respect than had ever before been witnessed in five hundred, if not a thousand, years.*"³¹ The first part of the book used

²⁷ ODNB, entry by Nicolas Walter. For McCabe's account of his years spent in a monastery, see Joseph McCabe, *Twelve Years in a Monastery* (London: Smith, Elder, 1897). This book appeared in several reprints and three editions during the following decades. Bill Cooke, *A Rebel to His Last Breath: Joseph McCabe and Rationalism* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2001), 36, 74, 77, 203. For McCabe's role in the Rationalist Press Association, see Bill Cooke, *The Blasphemy Depot: A Hundred Years of the Rationalist Press Association* (Great Britain: Rationalist Press Association, 2003), 32-33. Christopher Dawson gave a paper before the Conway Discussion Group of the Rationalist Press Association (year unknown); see: Christopher Dawson, "Rationalism and Intellectualism: The Religious Elements in the Rationalist Tradition," in *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (London and New York: Sheed & Ward, 1933).

²⁸ Joseph McCabe, *1825-1925: A Century of Stupendous Progress* (London: Watts, 1925), 2. See also: Joseph McCabe, *Can We Save Civilisation?* (London: Search, 1932).

²⁹ McCabe, *1825-1925: A Century of Stupendous Progress*, 2, 64.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-5. G. K. Chesterton included an essay on McCabe in his *Heretics* (London: John Lane, 1905).

³¹ *Ibid.*, vii (emphasis in the original).

statistics to prove an increase of good in the economic, social, moral, intellectual, and political spheres; the second part of the book sought to prove “that science is overwhelmingly responsible for the stupendous progress that has been made.” For McCabe, “Science has, in fact, explained itself. ...It is simply the human mind passing rapidly to a higher level of intelligence. ...Its province is the whole of reality.” Mathematics proved the reality of progress; therefore, all the pessimists were wrong because they were unscientific. “Pessimism is mere ignorance,” he ended the book. “A future more splendid than any poet can imagine is as certain as to-morrow’s sun. It will be created by science....”³²

Aside from McCabe’s dubious assumption that increases of good in all aspects of life can be measured quantitatively, he made a valuable point concerning the reality of progress as empirically observed fact: no one in his day would deny the great changes in material life resulting from the application of science to the natural world. Not without irony, Christopher Dawson put it this way: “Today, to the average European, and still more to the average American, Progress consists in the spread of the new urban-mechanical civilization: it means more cinemas, motor-cars for all, wireless installations, more elaborate methods of killing people, purchase on the hire system, preserved foods and picture papers.” Much of this material triumph, along with the ending of slavery and the establishing of universal education, Dawson wrote, was real progress indeed—and on this point he and McCabe agreed.³³

“But it is important to remember that this process of change is a strictly relative one,” Dawson the historian continued. “So far from being the necessary result of a universal process of evolution which embraces the whole life of humanity, it is an exceptional and indeed unique achievement of a single society at a particular stage of its development. It is not necessarily more permanent than the other achievements of past ages and cultures. It may even be questioned, as indeed it has been questioned by many, whether the modern advance of material civilization is progressive in the true sense of the word....”³⁴ Dawson was a severe critic of the popular and materialistic conception of science and progress glorified by people such as McCabe because of its focus on industrial and mechanical forms of progress that led to pollution of the environment and destruction of local regions, rural life, and aesthetic and healthy

³² Ibid., viii, 96, 167, 168.

³³ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 17, 18.

³⁴ Ibid., 18.

cities.³⁵ With words strikingly appropriate for the twenty-first century reader, Dawson wrote of those who then (in the 1920s) questioned progress:

They have seen the destruction of the finer forms of local life, and the disappearance of popular art and craftsmanship before a standardized mechanical civilization, as well as the havoc that has been wrought among the primitive peoples by European trade and conquest. They have realized the wastefulness of a system which recklessly exhausts the resources of nature for immediate gain, which destroys virgin forests to produce halfpenny newspapers, and dissipates the stored-up mineral energy of ages in an orgy of stench and smoke. Today few thinkers would be so bold as to identify the material advance of modern European civilization with Progress in the absolute sense....³⁶

Few indeed—except, perhaps, for McCabe. Several years later, in 1932, despite world-wide depression and political rumbling on the Continent, McCabe rejoiced in the “fundamental creed of the modern spirit: that we of this living generation are the masters of our fate, and that we shall frame our laws and our institutions with a single attention to our visible social needs and interests.”³⁷ His obituary in *The Times*, from the perspective of the 1950s, concluded that by the 1920s McCabe “seemed to have outlived his age.”³⁸

From McCabian materialism to the evolution of Mind: Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse (1864-1929) worked as a social philosopher and journalist. He was born in the village of St. Ive (near Liskeard), Cornwall, where his strict father was rector of the church. He studied at Oxford and imbibed the ideas of T. H. Green and philosophical idealism, though not without criticizing them.³⁹ Described starkly in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* as a man who, outside his tight circle of friends, “showed limited interest in people, while remaining passionate about humanity,”⁴⁰ Hobhouse devoted his life to the relationship between evolution and human progress. He believed in both firmly. One of his last students remembered: “I always had the idea that he concealed a wholly irrational (i.e., non-amenable to rational analysis) ‘Belief’ behind his brilliancy of analysis and interpretation. Otherwise it is hard to explain his dynamic. But what that ‘Belief’ was is difficult to say. It was wholly in the

³⁵ Christopher Dawson, “The Evolution of the Modern City,” *Town Planning Review* X (1923); Christopher Dawson, “The World Crisis and the English Tradition,” *English Review* LVI (1933); Christopher Dawson, “Catholicism and the Bourgeois Mind,” *Coloseum* II (1935).

³⁶ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 19.

³⁷ McCabe, *Can We Save Civilisation?*, 248.

³⁸ “Joseph McCabe: An Old-Fashioned Rationalist,” *Times* 26 January 1955, 10.

³⁹ For Green’s influence on Hobhouse, see David Weinstein, “The New Liberalism of L. T. Hobhouse and the Reenvisioning of Nineteenth-Century Utilitarianism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* LVII (1996): 496.

⁴⁰ ODNB, entry by Michael Freedon.

efficacy and ultimate rule of harmony, achieved through sympathetic reason; and to that extent it was a belief in man's salvation in Man."⁴¹ Hobhouse worked several years as a journalist for the *Manchester Guardian*. In 1906 he published *Morals in Evolution* and gained an academic reputation that helped him secure the first chair of sociology at the London School of Economics from 1907 until his death. He wrote the 1911 book *Liberalism* for the Home University Library, his most enduring work.⁴²

Hobhouse was a proponent of the pre-war "new liberalism" that sought to rethink the classical liberal focus on the primacy of the individual. Thus, he sought to found a philosophy not on the individualistic evolutionary theories of Herbert Spencer, but on a new cooperative conception of evolution and the suppression of the struggle for existence. For Hobhouse, Mind was the moving force of all development. The human mind was not simply a part of nature, but capable of actually directing evolution as a self-conscious force, regulating its own life and controlling its own development toward social cooperation through mastery of the physical and psychological conditions of existence. The self-conscious Mind was like a god, finite and emergent, the culmination of evolution, at which point, evolution could itself be directed. Ruling over the chaos of biological struggle for existence was Mind as the organizing principle of evolution. This meant that, "Human evolution...is the work of man—the product of the being who evolves. Man does not stand outside his own growth and plan it. He becomes aware of its possibilities as he grows, and, if we are right, there comes a stage when conception of the perfected growth seizes upon him, and makes him intelligently work towards it."⁴³ What was the perfected growth? The goal of this

⁴¹ J. A. Hobson and Morris Ginsberg, *L. T. Hobhouse: His Life and Work* (1924; London: Routledge/Thoemmes, 1996), quoted on p. 84 (the student is not named). Hobhouse was heavily influenced by Comte and positivism, and had almost a religious humanitarianism (pp. 100-101). Hobhouse believed that people could create their own religion, and that his (Hobhouse's) understanding of development and purpose, if sound, provided the answers to the meaning of life; see L. T. Hobhouse, *Development and Purpose: An Essay towards a Philosophy of Evolution*, revised ed. (1913; London: Macmillan, 1927), 485-486.

⁴² L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (London: Home University Library of Modern Knowledge, 1911). The Home University Library of Modern Knowledge published over twenty-five books that year, including, for example, *Evolution* (by Patrick Geddes and J. A. Thomson) and *The Socialist Movement* (by James Ramsay MacDonald). The Library in fact began in 1911 with the classical scholar Gilbert Murray as general editor. The aim was to present books by experts on a myriad of topics to people who did not have the opportunity to attend a university; by the outbreak of the Great War over one million copies of dozens of titles had been sold. See: Duncan Wilson, *Gilbert Murray 1866-1957* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 187-192.

⁴³ Randall C. Morris, "Whitehead and the New Liberals on Social Progress," *Journal of the History of Ideas* LI (1990): 86-87; Stefan Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology: L. T. Hobhouse and Political Argument in England, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), chap. 5; Wagar, *Good Tidings: The Belief in Progress from Darwin to Marcuse*, 53; Hobhouse, *Development and*

whole process was further environmental control and social *harmony*, defined as the “mutual support between two or more elements of a whole.”⁴⁴

In Hobhouse, one sees the doctrine of Progress stated in new evolutionary terms—not the blind, inevitable evolution of Spencer, the collusion of fact and ideal, but the conscious and ethical evolution of Mind. What of the Great War? The War had a deep impact on Hobhouse’s thinking about idealism and elicited much criticism of German thought and culture on his part,⁴⁵ but it did not significantly affect his positions on progress and development. Evidence for this is in the Introduction of the 1927 revised edition of *Development and Purpose* (first published in 1913), where Hobhouse admitted having to rethink the foundations of his thought due to the dramatic world events during the intervening years. Development might be arrested, “but mind is resilient and if we know its goal we may with confidence infer that its march thitherward will one day be resumed. Hence, whatever our hopes and fears for the present fabric of civilisation, I have, after weighing the adverse evidence, come to the conclusion that the conception of human development as moving to a maturity of rational self-direction...may be legitimately retained.” In this way, because of the Great War, Hobhouse shifted the idea of “rational self-direction” from being a description of the present to more of a goal in the future. The only real problem after the Great War was to convince people to take a firm, confident intellectual grasp upon the concept of conscious evolution. If people would do so, if they would only think about it hard enough, this would inspire the action necessary to make the future of civilization hopeful.⁴⁶

For Hobhouse, evolution was really the progressive intellectualization of nature through Mind, an attempt to read spiritual ideals into the evolutionary process. Such a conception, Christopher Dawson pointed out, however, was “not the only or the most obvious deduction to be drawn from the contemplation of the evolutionary process.” Indeed, he continued wryly, “In the presence of the same facts [of the evolutionary

Purpose: An Essay towards a Philosophy of Evolution, xviii, xxii, xxv, xxix, xxxiv; L. T. Hobhouse, *Social Development: Its Nature and Conditions* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1924), 335, 339-340, 343; L. T. Hobhouse, *Mind in Evolution*, 3rd ed. (1901; London: Macmillan, 1926), 436. The quotation comes from *Mind in Evolution*, p. 439.

⁴⁴ Hobhouse, *Development and Purpose: An Essay towards a Philosophy of Evolution*, 241. Griffin claims that the idea of “harmony” is the key to Hobhouse’s thought; see C. M. Griffin, “L. T. Hobhouse and the Idea of Harmony,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* XXXV (1974).

⁴⁵ Griffin, “L. T. Hobhouse and the Idea of Harmony,” 651-655. See Hobhouse’s attack on German thought in *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1918).

⁴⁶ Hobhouse, *Development and Purpose: An Essay towards a Philosophy of Evolution*, xxxv-xxxvi; Hobhouse, *Social Development: Its Nature and Conditions*, 339, 340.

process], a Hindu would see, not the gradual emergence of the human ethical ideal, but the manifestation of a universal cosmic energy.... And this interpretation of life which finds God in the whole cosmic process is at least as logical as that of the European idealist who sees God only in the human mind....”⁴⁷

Dawson did not accept Hobhouse’s interpretation of the evolution of Mind as evolving from the lower to the higher; “It may seem paradoxical to suggest,” Dawson wrote, “that the starting point of human progress is to be found in the highest type of knowledge—the intuition of pure being [a religious intuition], but it must be remembered that intellectually, at least, man’s development is not so much from the lower to the higher as from the confused to the distinct.”⁴⁸ This was a radical position indeed, but Dawson was not alone in critiquing the idea of the evolution of thought. The philosopher R. G. Collingwood argued in 1933 that new philosophical knowledge (as distinct from scientific knowledge) did not develop through history by incremental progress from ignorance to knowledge; one began with a dim and confused knowledge and on that basis went on to learn more, to clear up one’s thoughts on a particular matter (e.g., what is truth?).⁴⁹ G. K. Chesterton put the critique of the evolution of Mind this way: those obsessed by “evolutionary monomania” thought that “every great thing grows from a seed, or from something smaller than itself. They seem to forget that every seed comes from a tree, or something larger than itself.”⁵⁰ For Dawson, that “something larger than itself” which human progress depended on was a conception of reality shaped by religion and belief that gave temporal orientation to human thought—an argument that will hopefully become clearer later in this chapter.

While Hobhouse contemplated evolution, Francis Sydney Marvin (1863-1943) turned to the active work of furthering progress by the reform of the national educational curriculum. As a young man, Marvin met the leaders of positivism in London, “above all Dr. J. H. Bridges, who was the most philosophical and spiritually-minded of the group,” Marvin wrote.⁵¹ Commencing studies at Oxford in 1882, he later received a

⁴⁷ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 186.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

⁴⁹ Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, 96, 97.

⁵⁰ G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (1925; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 38, 87.

⁵¹ F. S. Marvin in Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, eds., *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1942). The entry in this volume for Marvin was mostly written by himself; the quotation is on page 924.

First in Greats (Classics) and a Second in Modern History. Marvin was heavily influenced by positivism;⁵² between 1893 and 1925 he contributed over one hundred articles to *The Positivist Review*, and one of his last books was on Auguste Comte (1936). Born in London into the family of a businessman and churchwarden, and with his mother dead by the age of two, Marvin turned away from his plans to enter the clergy as his faith faded in the 1880s. Instead, Marvin took up (in his words) “the nearest bit of social and religious work which I could think of,”⁵³ by becoming a teacher and then an inspector of schools in 1890 for the Board of Education. He held this position of inspector for over thirty years and worked to encourage interest in historical studies.⁵⁴

The Great War was the context within which Marvin’s thinking on progress bore fruit. From 1915 he initiated a series of Unity History Schools; these conferences continued until 1939 and led to Marvin working as editor of the Oxford University Press Unity Series (published during and after the war). The intention of the series was, in the face of destructive nationalism, to examine the permanent forces that had built up the world-community.⁵⁵ In reference to the war, Marvin wrote in 1916 at the beginning of a book-length collection of essays called *Progress and History*: “As to progress, the largest general ideal which can affect man’s action, it is only recently that mankind as a whole has been brought to grips with the conception, also enlarged to the full. He was standing, somewhat bewildered, somewhat dazzled, before it, when the war, like an eclipse of the sun, came suddenly and darkened the view. But an eclipse has been found an invaluable time for studying some of the problems of the

⁵² “Positivism” assumed its most distinctive features in the work of the French philosopher Auguste Comte (*Cours de philosophie positive*, 1830-1842); its basic tenet was that all knowledge regarding matters of fact was based on the data of experience, necessitating “strict adherence to the testimony of observation and experience;” ideologically, positivism was worldly, secular, antitheological, and antimetaphysical—see *Britannica Macropædia* (2002), “Philosophical Schools and Doctrines, Western,” p. 630-631. However, Comte did not deny the religious impulse of human beings; after the decay of revealed religion, he thought, the proper object of this impulse would become man himself. The word “positive” referred to the constructive nature of Comte’s ideas on the need to progress beyond the sterility of metaphysical abstractions to a better organization of society via scientific sociology.

⁵³ F. S. Marvin in Kunitz and Haycraft, eds., *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature*, 924.

⁵⁴ Cecil H. Desch, “Francis Sidney Marvin, 1863-1943,” *Isis* XXXVI (1945-1946): 7-9.

⁵⁵ Some of Marvin’s books included: *A Century of Hope: A Sketch of Western Progress from 1815 to the Great War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1919), second edition, 1919; *The Living Past: A Sketch of Western Progress* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 2nd ed., 1915, 3rd ed. 1917, 4th ed., 1920, 5th ed., 1931 (all Clarendon Press). The Unity Series (edited by Marvin) included many books, such as: *Progress and History* (one edition, 1916—quoted below in this chapter) and *The Unity of Western Civilization* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1915), 2nd ed., 1922, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 4th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1936).

sun's nature and of light itself."⁵⁶ Marvin did not question the reality of progress. For him, the war was a break from the blinding reality of progress in preparation for more of it.

In the third edition (1929) of *The Unity of Western Civilization*, Marvin wrote that the experience of war taught everyone of the necessity to pursue the prosperity of all, not just of England. What were the grounds of unity? Marvin asserted that of all modern steps toward international unity, the pursuit of science had been the most important. Why science? Because it possessed the largest number of certain and accepted laws, it pursued the common good, and through joint action sought a common body of knowledge whose purpose was a happier world. Thus, with the spread of science, people would be adverse to war—especially when they were educated into the history of the rise of science and scientific progress to modern times. "It is from history that we derive the first idea and the accumulating proofs of the reality of progress." Therefore, "The more prominence...that we can secure for the growth of science in the teaching of history, the larger place humanity, or the united mind of mankind, will take in the moving picture which every one of us has, more or less full and distinct, of the progress of the world."⁵⁷ Marvin's link between *history* and *science* was his recipe for further human progress which became the center of his writing and his active work.

For Marvin, the cause of progress was the "collective forces of mankind as expressed in history. These have given the ideal [Progress] and will carry us on towards it by a force which is greater than, and in one sense independent of, any individual will." Progress was almost inevitable, for "We are all, let us suppose, being carried onward by one mighty and irresistible stream."⁵⁸ Despite this near-determinism, however, Marvin approached Hobhouse's position when he wrote, "We seem to have reached the point in history when for the first time we are really conscious of our position, and the problem is now a possible and an urgent one to

⁵⁶ F. S. Marvin, "The Idea of Progress," in *Progress and History*, ed. F. S. Marvin (London: Humphrey Milford, 1916), 21.

⁵⁷ ———, ed., *The Unity of Western Civilization*, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), Preface to the 2nd edition, reprinted here, and pp. 32, 33; Marvin, "The Idea of Progress," 18.

⁵⁸ The idea of progress as an "irresistible stream" was also expressed by H. G. Wells: "We are all things that make and pass, striving upon a hidden mission, out to the open sea." This was the last line on the last page of H. G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay* (London: Macmillan, 1909). In 1925, F. Scott Fitzgerald reversed this image with the last line of his novel: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." See: F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). I am grateful to Owen Dudley Edwards for pointing this out to me and for his help on this chapter as a whole.

mark the goal clearly and unitedly and bend our common efforts to attaining it.” What was the goal? “The end is a more perfect man, developed by the perfecting of all mankind.” The progress of humanity to a “higher state of being,” he declared, was the uniting thread of the book he edited called *Progress and History* (1916).⁵⁹

Marvin did not leave his high-sounding ideals on high; he made practical efforts to bring them down to earth. Marvin was part of a larger movement in Britain during the 1920s to integrate scientific study into a traditional moral and liberal education. History was seen as a way to unite the sciences and the arts, and the *history of science* the foundation for understanding the relationship between science and social progress. Through Marvin’s writings, edited books, and membership in the Historical Association—the leading organization of teachers of history in British schools—he spread his ideas. In the minds of Marvin, Charles Singer (Britain’s first professional historian of science and ally of Marvin), and the Board of Education in the 1920s, students would experience a change in their actual *character* under “the impact of the historical experience of science.” This would happen because the “history of science claimed to transmit the experience of the progress and regress of a larger whole in which the fate of civilization became bound up with the fate of science.”⁶⁰ For Marvin, science embodied the virtue of cooperation as great scientists relied on the collaborative work of others, in the present and in the past. The rise of science thus embodied social ethics and exemplified the kind of behavior that secured the progress of man.⁶¹ Exposure of young minds to this history of progress would ensure further progress. For Marvin and others of his time, *educationism* (“the belief in the difference education could make to the problems of modern society”⁶²) revolved around a new national curriculum based on the history of science that would provide the basis for future human progress. The post-war push for the history of science generated significant attention, as in the creation of the Department for the History and Method of Science at University College, London (1921), and the famous International Congress for the History of Science and Technology (1931).

In Marvin and others after the Great War one sees a shift in British historiography away from national history. This was the underlying motive of the Oxford Unity

⁵⁹ The quotations in this whole paragraph come from Marvin, “The Idea of Progress,” 22-25.

⁶⁰ A. K. Mayer, “Moralizing Science: the Uses of Science’s Past in National Education in the 1920s,” *British Journal for the History of Science* XXX (1997): 61, 66, 68.

⁶¹ ———, “Fatal Mutilations: Educationism and the British Background to the 1931 International Congress for the History of Science and Technology,” *History of Science* XL (2002): 453.

⁶² *Ibid.*: 447.

Series, which Marvin edited. For him, the principle of unity to the study of history, that which organized the myriad of details and would ensure human progress, was the history of international science. Implicitly, Christopher Dawson very much agreed with Marvin on the need for a new history.⁶³ Dawson blamed the radical national interpretation of history as one of the causes behind the Great War. He wrote that “the peoples of Europe will never be able to co-operate in peace, so long as they have no knowledge of their common cultural traditions and no revelation of the unity of European civilisation.”⁶⁴ Another man who whole-heartedly agreed with the need for a new international history was H. G. Wells.

After the Great War, the famous novelist and social commentator H. G. Wells (1866-1946), though not a trained historian, recognized a pressing need for a new kind of history, one much different than the old national histories. Partly inspired by Marvin’s *Living Past: A Sketch of Western Progress*,⁶⁵ Wells’s famous 1920 *Outline of History* (conceived at the same time as the League of Nations) provided an answer: progressive universal history, and the book became a best-seller.

Wells studied biology under T. H. Huxley as a young man, an experience that influenced much of his later work. Wells’s novel *The Time Machine* (1895) brought him fame and popularized a new genre of literature: the scientific thriller (scientific romance or “science fiction”), a genre concerned with “mythologies of power” reaching from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) to today.⁶⁶ Through his fiction, and later his history, Wells had a huge impact on his time. Indeed, George Orwell,

⁶³ Dawson knew Marvin’s work, listing three of his books in the bibliography to *Progress and Religion*. In 1932 Dawson wrote from Dawlish, Devon, to his friend in the Sociological Society Alexander Farquharson: “Do you know Marvin? He has been writing to me about my book & I have an idea that he used to have some connection with the Soc[iological] Soc[iety].” Dawson to Farquharson, 22 July 1932, KA-AF, folder “Christopher Dawson Letters.” Farquharson replied: “Marvin is an old member of the Sociological Society although we have seen but little of him in recent years. I know his work well and like it. Personally, of course, he is a man who has made many enemies by his difficult manner....” Farquharson to Dawson, 1 November 1932, KA-AF, folder “Christopher Dawson Letters.”

⁶⁴ Christopher Dawson, *The Age of the Gods: A Study in the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient East* (London: John Murray, 1928), xiii.

⁶⁵ Marvin’s book, first published in 1913, was already in its fourth edition by the time Wells’s appeared. Wells specifically mentioned Marvin’s book on p. 2 of the *Outline*, and apparently, at a dinner in honor of Marvin’s seventieth birthday, Wells declared that Marvin’s earlier book had inspired his own—see Desch, “Francis Sidney Marvin, 1863-1943,” 9. For his own part, Marvin favorably reviewed Wells’s book in *The Positivist Review*, asserting that “the ‘Outline of History’ is in a broad sense a Positivist work” in its optimistic view of the approaching human unity. See: F. S. Marvin, “Mr. Wells’ ‘Outline of History,’” *Positivist Review* XXIX (1921): 153. Wells also paid his respects to Winwood Reade’s 1872 *The Martyrdom of Man* (p. 2, *Outline*) as a precursor to his work. Reade’s book, an introduction to “universal history” by an amateur, stayed in print for decades.

⁶⁶ OCEL, “Science Fiction,” 906.

while not an admirer of Wells's political positions, nevertheless paid him homage: "Thinking people who were born about the beginning of this century are in some sense Wells's own creation. How much influence any mere writer has...is questionable, but I doubt whether anyone who was writing books between 1900 and 1920, at any rate in the English language, influenced the young so much."⁶⁷ Nevertheless, during the Great War, Wells's view that the soldiers fought "the war that will end war"⁶⁸ failed to speak directly to their experience on the front. Wells visited the front twice, but it seems that he was more interested in "humanity" than in the common soldier, as those who met him realized. Alas, though Wells could express the pain of personal loss, he often lacked the patience to try to understand the miseries of the human condition in the present. He wanted to *change* human nature, to save it by appeals to utopia through the power of persuasion he so confidently believed he possessed.⁶⁹

For Wells, progress was the increasing unity of mankind, a long-standing theme in the tradition of thinking about progress reaching back to the eighteenth century. The final chapter of his *Outline* was called: "The Possible Unification of the World into One Community of Knowledge and Will." Wells believed that this was more than just "possible," however; with his imagination charged by the awful destruction of 1914-1918, Wells wrote with passion: "Sooner or later that unity must come or else plainly men must perish by their own inventions. We, because we believe in the power of reason and in the increasing good-will in men, find ourselves compelled to reject the latter possibility."⁷⁰

Wells was not always so optimistic, however. As a young man in his fiction he painted a picture of dystopia (e.g., in *The Time Machine* of 1895), and in old age during the Second World War he sounded despairing notes because no one had

⁶⁷ George Orwell, "Wells, Hitler, and the World State," *Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art* IV (1941): 137.

⁶⁸ For Wells, the Great War, while a disaster, was also a necessary purification clearing the way toward higher progress; see H. G. Wells, *The War that will End War* (London: Frank & Cecil Palmer, 1914); H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind* (London: George Newnes, 1920), 748.

⁶⁹ Christopher Coker, *War and the 20th Century: A Study of War and Modern Consciousness* (London and Washington: Brassey's, 1994), 104, 106, 108; Field, *British and French Writers of the First World War: Comparative Studies in Cultural History*, 134-135, 139.

⁷⁰ Ginsberg, "Progress in the Modern Era," 638; Wells, *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind*, 751.

heeded his prophecies (“I told you so. You *damned* fools.”)⁷¹ Even though in his optimistic middle period he wrote as an evangelist for progress and science, Wells’s thinking was founded on “threatened progress.”⁷² In *The Salvaging of Civilization* (1921), Wells wrote: “The spectacular catastrophe of the Great War has revealed an accumulation of destructive forces in our outwardly prosperous society, of which few of us had dreamt; and it has also revealed a profound incapacity to deal with and restrain those forces.”⁷³

How to avoid disaster? Wells thought that to overcome destructive nationalist traditions and embrace the true “nationality” of mankind, a rigorous educational scheme must be put in place based on the principle that “*there can be no common peace and prosperity without common historical ideas.*”⁷⁴ Wells shared Marvin’s and Dawson’s concern—on the heels of the Great War—for a common interpretation of history at a time when the specialists failed to grasp the total issues on which the life of humanity depended. In fact, unlike the hostile approach of the Catholic controversialist Hilaire Belloc toward Wells, and despite his own critique of Wells’s materialism, Dawson praised Wells’s historical vision and originality in trying to identify the broad lines of development in human social evolution.⁷⁵ In Wells’s 1921 book *The Salvaging of Civilization*, he declared that the teaching of a new common interpretation of history would be aided by a new common book, a new Bible of history, science, and wisdom. Indeed, the new book would have a function very much like the actual cosmogony and world history of the Bible of old. Wells offered his own *Outline*, which traced biological and human life from its early evolution to the

⁷¹ Wagar, *Good Tidings: The Belief in Progress from Darwin to Marcuse*, 50, 169-170. The quotation is Wells’s self-written epitaph (italics are his) that concludes the short Preface of the 1941 edition of H. G. Wells, *The War in the Air* (1908; Thirsk: House of Stratus, 2002), iii.

⁷² Paul Costello, *World Historians and Their Goals: Twentieth-Century Answers to Modernism* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), 23.

⁷³ H. G. Wells, *The Salvaging of Civilization* (London: Cassell, 1921), 1. See also W. Warren Wagar, *H. G. Wells and the World State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 271, 272.

⁷⁴ Wells, *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind*, 2, 750 (emphasis in the original).

⁷⁵ See the debate between Wells and Belloc: Hilaire Belloc, *A Companion to Mr Wells's "Outline of History"* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1926); H. G. Wells, *Mr. Belloc Objects to "The Outline of History"* (London: Watts, 1926); Hilaire Belloc, *Mr. Belloc Still Objects to Mr. Wells's "Outline of History"* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1926). See especially Wells’s final chapter “Fixity or Progress.” For Dawson’s discussion of Wells, including his criticism of Wells on historical grounds for—ironically—giving enough attention to the history of science, see Christopher Dawson, “H. G. Wells and the Outline of History,” in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1958; Wilmington: ISI Books, 2002). This article was first published in *History Today* I (October 1951). See also: Christopher Dawson, review of *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*, by H. G. Wells, *Criterion* XII (1932).

Great War, as an example of what he meant.⁷⁶ Education in a common understanding of life and history would help change the hearts of millions of people to look to the good of the community and not only of themselves. Ultimately, human progress rested on moral effort: all individual people must learn to subsume egoism to a faith in common advance into the future. This “would complete the current task of evolution by creating a common mind and will.”⁷⁷ The forces of evolving unity, combined with the educational efforts outlined above, would form the basis for the creation of a world-state, the only solution for the post-war world. By tracing the progress of the idea of a common humanity in the past and projecting it on the future, Wells’s thought ended in a political vision of world government. Though the roots of this utopian vision reached back to Wells’s years in the Fabian Society (1903-1908), after 1914 Wells broke with the socialist movement because socialism—he thought—could not explain the crisis of the Great War. Instead, Wells looked to education, historical vision, and the forces of evolution to secure his hope in the future.⁷⁸

From secular prophet to sober scholar, John Bagnell Bury (1861-1927), classicist and historian of the late Roman and Byzantine empires, wrote the famous book of intellectual history called *The Idea of Progress* (1920). Born in County Monaghan, Ireland, to a clerical father and a well-read mother, Bury learned classical languages from an early age. He studied at Trinity College, Dublin, and in Germany. In 1902 Bury was appointed regius professor of modern history at Cambridge, a position he held until his death. Near the end of his life, Bury edited and contributed to the *Cambridge Ancient History* (1924-1939).

Bury favored rigorous scientific methods for historical research. While at Cambridge and within the British historical profession, Bury was regarded as the “prototype of an objective and impartial scholar.”⁷⁹ The ideals of history as science and the exclusion of personal judgments are obvious in his famous inaugural lecture

⁷⁶ Wells, *The Salvaging of Civilization*, 37, 95, 155.

⁷⁷ Costello, *World Historians and Their Goals: Twentieth-Century Answers to Modernism*, 23.

⁷⁸ Wells, *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind*, 2, and final chapter. Wells’s vision of the world-state was brilliantly criticized in Orwell, “Wells, Hitler, and the World State.” Wells preached on this vision at F. S. Marvin’s fourth Unity School, held at Woodbrooke in 1920, in a course organized as a “historical introduction” to the League of Nations (Marvin was a huge fan of the League). See: H. G. Wells, “An Apology for a World Utopia,” in *The Evolution of World Peace*, ed. F. S. Marvin (London: Humphrey Milford, 1921). For Wells’s turn from socialism, see Wagar, *H. G. Wells and the World State*, 98-101.

⁷⁹ Doris S. Goldstein, “J. B. Bury’s Philosophy of History: A Reappraisal,” *American Historical Review* LXXXII (1977): 911.

at Cambridge.⁸⁰ However, as Goldstein has highlighted,⁸¹ there is a radical disjuncture between the thrust of most of Bury's work and his "other side" which denied the possibility and desirability of freedom from bias. In an unusual letter at the end of his life, Bury said that personal vision was important for great history, and that without bias, the historian will produce "colourless and dull work."⁸² Nevertheless, the scientific ideal underpinned most of Bury's work.

For Bury, progress meant the increase of knowledge through research. Human life would become more logical and less subject to contingencies as command over nature grew. The "march of science is continuous, systematic, and imperturbable."⁸³ In his inaugural lecture, Bury stated that since accurate knowledge of the past was crucial for making sound decisions in the present and future, a true understanding of history was needed for "moulding our evolution...." He continued: "It is therefore of supreme moment that the history which is taught should be true; and that can be attained only through the discovery, collection, classification, and interpretation of facts,—through scientific research." The purpose of historical research was the progressive accumulation of knowledge until, someday in the future, historical truth would emerge. The labor of historians "has to be done in faith.... The labour is performed for posterity—for remote posterity...."⁸⁴

Bury's rationalistic beliefs,⁸⁵ his scientific ideal, and his understanding of the idea of Progress provided the unity to his understanding of history in his *History of Freedom of Thought* for the Home University Library in 1914. The table of contents was indicative: after the introductory chapter, Chapter 2 was called: Reason Free (Greece and Rome), Chapter 3: Reason in Prison (the Middle Ages), Chapter 4: Prospect of Deliverance (the Renaissance and the Reformation), and Chapter 7: The Progress of Rationalism (Nineteenth Century). This rationalist perspective on history,

⁸⁰ J. B. Bury, *An Inaugural Lecture, Delivered in the Divinity School Cambridge on January 26, 1903* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903).

⁸¹ Goldstein, "J. B. Bury's Philosophy of History: A Reappraisal," 911.

⁸² J. B. Bury, "A Letter on the Writing of History," in *Selected Essays of J. B. Bury*, ed. Harold Temperley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930.), 70. First published in the *Morning Post* 30 November 1926.

⁸³ ———, "Cleopatra's Nose," in *Selected Essays of J. B. Bury*, ed. Harold Temperley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 69. This essay was first published in the *R.P.A. Annual* (1916): 16-23.

⁸⁴ Bury, *An Inaugural Lecture, Delivered in the Divinity School Cambridge on January 26, 1903*, 23, 24, 31-32; Goldstein, "J. B. Bury's Philosophy of History: A Reappraisal," 906.

⁸⁵ For Bury's own description of rationalism, see the Introduction to J. B. Bury, *A History of Freedom of Thought*, Home University Library of Modern Knowledge (London: Williams & Norgate, 1913). "The uncompromising assertion by reason of her absolute rights throughout the whole domain of thought is termed *rationalism*" (p. 18).

with its intellectual hostility to religion and the Medieval Age, also structured *The Idea of Progress* (dedicated to the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, Condorcet, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and “other optimists mentioned in this volume”).⁸⁶

In 1920 Bury wrote *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*; its publication brought wide acclaim. Robert E. Park, reviewing the book in *The American Journal of Sociology*, said: “Of all that has been written on progress Mr. Bury’s book is unquestionably the most interesting, illuminating, and convincing.”⁸⁷ The subject of the book was the history of the *idea* of Progress, not the fact, content, or value of the theory of progress;⁸⁸ it was simply an historical treatment of the life-story of an idea to which Bury gave a very simple definition: the belief that men are advancing in a “definite and desirable direction.” The idea of Progress was both a “synthesis of the past and a prophecy of the future.”⁸⁹ The majority of the book focused on various thinkers from the seventeenth to the late nineteenth centuries. Bury’s thesis was that: “Ideas have their intellectual climates, and I propose to show briefly in this Introduction that the intellectual climates of classical antiquity and the ensuing ages were not propitious to the birth of the doctrine of Progress. It is not until the sixteenth century that the obstacles to its appearance definitely begin to be transcended and a favourable atmosphere to be gradually prepared.” The cyclical

⁸⁶ Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, v. Bury did, however, possess sociological appreciation for the transformative power of Christianity in the late Roman world in his fair and sensitive study of St. Patrick—see J. B. Bury, *The Life of St. Patrick and His Place in History* (London: Macmillan, 1905). Bury had been interested in historical development and the idea of Progress many years before the publication of *The Idea of Progress*; see his Introduction in Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury (1896-1900; London: Methuen, 1909). Christopher Dawson also wrote an Introduction to an edition of Gibbon (in which he praised Bury as Gibbon’s “most learned” editor; see Edward Gibbon, *Gibbon’s Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1954). Dawson once wrote of Bury’s *History of the Freedom of Thought*: “It is true that so distinguished an historian as the late J. B. Bury could still describe medieval thought under the rubric *Reason in Prison*, but the book in question was written with a pronounced rationalistic bias, and as a rule even those who regard medieval metaphysics as of purely historical interest, nevertheless recognize, like Prof. Whitehead, that the European mind received from medieval scholasticism that fundamental training in rational thought on which all its later achievements are dependent.” See Christopher Dawson, *Medieval Essays* (1954; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 119. He referred to Alfred North Whitehead’s *Science and the Modern World* (1925).

⁸⁷ Robert E. Park, review of *The Idea of Progress*, *American Journal of Sociology* XXVII (1922): 669. Also very favorable: Thomas Munro, review of *The Idea of Progress*, *Journal of Philosophy* XVIII (1921); A. E. Felkin, review of *The Idea of Progress*, *International Journal of Ethics* XXXI (1921); Carl L. Becker, review of *The Idea of Progress*, *American Historical Review* XXVI (1920); Carl L. Becker, review of *The Idea of Progress* (Introduction by Charles A. Beard), *American Historical Review* XXXVIII (1933).

⁸⁸ Bury was criticized by P. V. M. Benecke, Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, for leaving out the most essential task: examination of the value of the theory of progress. See P. V. M. Benecke, review of *The Idea of Progress*, *English Historical Review* XXXV (1920): 581.

⁸⁹ Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, 5.

theories of the Greeks hindered any growth of the idea of Progress; in the Middle Ages, the situation was even worse, for, "The whole spirit of medieval Christianity excluded it [the idea of Progress]." This was because a belief in Providence meant that men focused on the supernatural world while expecting a sudden end to the natural world, and this effectively made any idea of Progress impossible.⁹⁰ The second part of his thesis, which was developed in the rest of the book, was that the idea of Progress was essentially bound to the intellectual atmosphere of the *modern* world as "one continuous rationalistic movement" beginning with Francis Bacon and René Descartes in the seventeenth century. This thesis that Progress was distinctively a modern achievement quickly became an historical orthodoxy.⁹¹

J. B. Bury and Christopher Dawson

After the Second World War, a major international reevaluation of the Bury thesis commenced, stressing the importance of the Christian theological and historical background to the idea of Progress.⁹² This critique of the idea of Progress was begun systematically by Dawson's book *Progress and Religion* in 1929, which was received with wide acclaim.⁹³ Alone among Catholic thinkers in Britain of that time, Dawson built on the work of the survival-of-hope thinkers (books by Hobhouse, Marvin, and Bury appeared in the bibliography of *Progress and Religion*). However, because of his consideration—and rejection—of the radical pessimism of Spengler during the

⁹⁰ Ibid., 7, 29. F. S. Marvin criticized Bury for his "negative attitude towards those who have contributed to the doctrine of Progress from the theological...point of view [Marvin mentioned, for example, St. Augustine]. ...One notices, in fact, at the present time, when the triumphs of science are somewhat discounted by its use in war, that the belief in Progress finds some of its strongest supporters in those who try to take the eternal or superhuman view of the tragedies of the moment and hold that there is a Providence overruling them and the human passions...." F. S. Marvin, "Progress: The Idea and the Reality," *Contemporary Review* CXVIII (1920): 234, 235.

⁹¹ Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, 127; Leslie Sklair, *The Sociology of Progress* (London: Routledge, 1970), 88; W. Warren Wagar, "Modern Views of the Origins of the Idea of Progress," *Journal of the History of Ideas* XXVIII (1967): 60. Survival-of-hope thinkers certainly knew Bury's book; see Hobhouse, *Social Development: Its Nature and Conditions*, 338-339; Marvin, "Progress: The Idea and the Reality." Dawson also knew the book, as mentioned in the next section of this chapter.

⁹² Wagar, "Modern Views of the Origins of the Idea of Progress," 63-64. See: Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949); Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History* (London: Nisbet, 1949); Baillie, *The Belief in Progress*; Emil Brunner, *Eternal Hope*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth, 1954). The critique has appeared most recently in Pope Benedict XVI, "Spe Salvi," <http://www.vatican.va>, 4 December 2007. See paragraphs 16-23. Benedict does not specifically mention Bury, however.

⁹³ Evelyn Underhill, "A Philosophy of Civilization," review of *Progress and Religion*, *Spectator*, 18 May 1929; Rachel Annand Taylor, review of *Progress and Religion*, *Sociological Review* XXII (1930); Vera Brittain, "Modern Europe Adrift," review of *Progress and Religion*, *Time and Tide* X (1929); H. F. Davis, review of *Progress and Religion*, *Clergy Review* I (1931).

early 1920s,⁹⁴ his appreciation for both science *and* religion as potential factors in cultural change,⁹⁵ and his study of books such as *Science and the Modern World* (1925) by Alfred North Whitehead and *The Nature of the Physical World* (1928) by A. S. Eddington (both of which critically examined the nature and conditions of scientific knowledge), Dawson diverged from the rationalism of the survival-of-hope thinkers.

Dawson disagreed with Bury's explanation for the origin of the idea of Progress. For Bury, the idea of Progress could only have arisen when three conditions were met: when science rested firmly on the invariable laws of nature, when the intellectual authority of the Greeks and Romans was challenged, and when religion stepped aside as a controlling idea in human life, as it had been in the Middle Ages. These conditions occurred in the seventeenth century.⁹⁶ Bury wrote of Cartesianism as affirming "the two positive axioms of the supremacy of reason, and the invariability of the laws of nature" as the atmosphere in which "a theory of Progress was to take shape." However, he did not explain where the idea itself came from, why *confidence in reason* should become linked to *immanent social teleology*, thus forming the idea of Progress as a particular perspective on reality. For Bury, the idea was a thing-in-itself, existing on its own merit, only waiting to be freed from its chains. He seemed to assume that with the destruction of various psychological and intellectual obstacles (the three conditions mentioned above) it would burst upon the world like a bird exploding from an open cage door.⁹⁷

Dawson agreed with Bury on the importance of modern science for the rise of the idea of Progress.⁹⁸ However, the real roots of the idea of Progress were in something

⁹⁴ Christopher Dawson, "Herr Spengler and the Life of Civilisations," *Sociological Review* XIV (1922).

⁹⁵ Dawson more directly addressed the relationship between religion and science in the two final chapters of ———, *The Modern Dilemma: The Problem of European Unity* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932).

⁹⁶ Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, 22, 66.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 65. Bury: "We have seen several reasons why the idea could not emerge in the ancient or in the Middle Ages. Nor could it have easily appeared in the period of the Renaissance. Certain preliminary conditions were required, and these were not fulfilled till the seventeenth century" (65-66). Quentin Skinner has criticized Bury for writing of the idea of Progress as a thing-in-itself, an "it"; see Quentin Skinner, *Regarding Method*, vol. I, *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 62.

⁹⁸ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 143-145.

deeper, Dawson thought. Anticipating arguments developed two years later by Carl Becker,⁹⁹ Dawson wrote that while:

the philosophers of the 18th century attempted to substitute their new rationalist doctrines for the ancient faith of Christendom, they were in reality simply abstracting from it those elements which had entered so deeply into their own thought that they no longer recognized their origin. ...Above all this was the case with the idea of Progress, for while the new philosophy had no place for the supernaturalism of the Christian eschatology, it could not divest itself of the Christian teleological conception of life. Thus the belief in the moral perfectibility and the indefinite progress of the human race took the place of the Christian faith in the life of the world to come, as the final goal of human effort.¹⁰⁰

For Dawson, the rise of the idea of Progress was related to the secularization of positive Christian beliefs. The first man identified by both Bury and Dawson to have formulated the idea of Progress—the Abbé de St. Pierre (1658-1743)—was a radical Catholic priest, Dawson pointed out.¹⁰¹ Thus, he challenged not only Bury's historical account, but his rationalist perspective as well; for, on what did optimistic eighteenth-century rationalism rest? The sources of the eighteenth-century idea of Progress were not only reason and science, but also the Christian teleological conception of reality, Dawson thought.

Religion was not necessarily a barrier to progress; for Dawson, the idea of Progress—and the fact of progress—rested on religious foundations. How did he argue his case? He began with an empirical approach by investigating the actual historical conditions of human life. And on this methodological point he and Bury agreed, even if the latter failed to follow his own advice to the full. Significant insight into Dawson's method in *Progress and Religion* can be gained by study of a brilliant lecture given by Bury. In 1904 Bury gave "The Place of Modern History in the Perspective of Knowledge" at the Congress of Arts and Sciences, St. Louis, USA.

⁹⁹ See his 1931 Storrs Lectures given at the School of Law, Yale University, and published as Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932). Becker's thesis was that "the *Philosophes* were nearer the Middle Ages, less emancipated from the preconceptions of medieval Christian thought, than they quite realized or we have commonly supposed" (29). Although Becker positively reviewed Bury's account of the rise of the modern idea of Progress (see footnote 82 above), he underlined the relativity of the idea and the pessimistic implications of the universe as presented by modern science—a universe in perpetual flux—for belief in progress as a fact; see Carl L. Becker, "Progress," in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. Edwin R. A. Seligman and Alvin Johnson (London: Macmillan, 1934), vol. XII. I am not the first to link Becker and Dawson and the significance of their new perspective on the eighteenth century—see Wagar, "Modern Views of the Origins of the Idea of Progress," 62-63. Becker's thesis attracted much attention and debate; see Wagar's article just mentioned, and, most famously, Peter Gay, "Carl Becker's Heavenly City," in *Carl Becker's Heavenly City Revisited*, ed. Raymond O. Rockwood (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1958).

¹⁰⁰ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 149. See also: Christopher Dawson, "Christianity and the Idea of Progress," *Dublin Review* CLXXX (1927): 28.

¹⁰¹ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 150.

Here he laid out the case for a new approach to the whole problem of historical development. What were the principles of this new approach? Where did one look to find these principles? Firstly, Bury said that there are two places *not* to look for them. (1) One should not look to the great philosophies of history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as in Bossuet or Hegel. In them, mostly constructed by philosophers, not historians, “The principles of development are superimposed upon the phenomena, instead of being given by the phenomena; and the authors of the schemes had no thorough or penetrative knowledge of the facts which they undertook to explain.” The frameworks of the philosophical histories were always made *a priori*.¹⁰² (2) The interpreter of the movement of history must not begin research in the ancient or medieval periods because there are too many holes in the records. One might think that the best way to understand historical development was to start from earliest historical times and work *forward*. But this was not so, Bury wrote, because available sources for these early times were so limited that one could in no way come to certainty about the principles of development. It is impossible to form an accurate synthesis of historical development based on study of ancient history.

This is a remarkable thing to say for an ancient historian; rather than starting from *a-priori* assumptions or the incomplete evidence of ancient times, Bury says, one must study the phenomena of human life in the present (in *modern* history) scientifically and induce from them the principles of development. This means that, “The interpreter of the movement of history must proceed backward, not forward; he must *start from the modern period*.” Why? Because a “thorough, fully articulated knowledge of the phenomena” of human life is essential. “The problem then is, having grasped the movement of the ideas and spiritual forces which have revealed themselves in the modern period, to trace, regressively, the processes out of which they evolved, with the help of our records. This, at least, is the ideal to which the interpreter would try to approximate.”¹⁰³ This dazzling insight of Bury’s into “regressive history” describes well Dawson’s efforts in *Progress and Religion*, even though he himself (Bury) never fully took his own advice. Bury started with a modern idea, with an *a priori* assumption, and then traced its story diachronically. By Bury’s

¹⁰² J. B. Bury, “The Place of Modern History in the Perspective of Knowledge,” in *Selected Essays of J. B. Bury*, ed. Harold Temperley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 48.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 51, 54.

own admission, he traced the *idea* of Progress—he did not seek the actual sociological principles of development. But Dawson did.

Dawson began by rejecting the “enlightened” assumptions of British anthropologists from Edward Tylor (1832-1917) to James Frazer (1854-1941) concerning the materialistic basis of primitive religious attitudes. Instead, he drew from a host of sources such as American anthropologists like A. L. Kroeber (1876-1960), Clark Wissler (1870-1947), and R. H. Lowie (1883-1957); British travel accounts like those of Mary Kingsley (1862-1900); and the seventeenth-century *Jesuit Relations*, to show that, far from primitive materialism, “The whole mentality of primitive man is religious. His conception of reality is never limited to what he sees and touches.”¹⁰⁴ In this way, social anthropologist Mary Douglas (1921-2007) wrote (in her Introduction to the 2001 edition of Dawson’s book), Dawson “artfully stages a dialogue between the eighteenth-century philosophers, Condorcet, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel, and the people they thought of as primitive: the Sioux, Dakota and Tlingit Indians, native Australians, African Bushmen, Zulus, and Shamans of the Arctic and world wide, are given a chance to put in their word.”¹⁰⁵

Nor, Dawson thought, was religion simply a collective phenomenon, as Émile Durkheim held, because of the importance of individual thought and leadership in early religious development. Rather, the “dynamic element in primitive culture is to be found...in the sphere of direct religious experience...” Dawson wrote.¹⁰⁶ For example, “The experience of Mohammed in the cave of Mount Hira, when he saw human life as transitory as the beat of a gnat’s wing in comparison with the splendour and power of the Divine Unity, has shaped the existence of a great part of the human race ever since.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 71. During the 1920s, anthropology reached its mature form in the work of these anthropologists and others who gave the concept “culture” a new position as a theoretical entity with explanatory power over human action and thought; see Mark W. Risjord, “Ethnography and Culture,” in *Philosophy of Anthropology and Sociology*, ed. Stephen P. Turner and Mark W. Risjord (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 2007).

¹⁰⁵ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, xxiii. Dawson may have been conscious of this aspect of his method. In *Religion and Culture* he mentioned Joseph de Maistre, who, in his reaction against the Enlightenment, viewed with greater sympathy all that which had hitherto been regarded by philosophers and historians as irrational and barbarous. “Sacrifice, Karma, asceticism, tabu, all became comprehensible and religiously valid in de Maistre’s philosophy of history. It is significant that in the *Evenings at St. Petersburg* the discussion centres on a long quotation from the Laws of Manu which cannot have been very familiar reading to the literary public of that date, and throughout the dialogues *he calls in the wisdom of the East to answer the reasoning of the West.*” Christopher Dawson, *Religion and Culture* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1948), 13 (emphasis added).

¹⁰⁶ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 66, 76.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

Dawson thought that the rise of organized priesthood was the crucial step in linking religious experience to progress. This was because the priesthood, as a social institution, joined religious experience to communal ritual, human thought, and social concerns, which in turn fostered amazing progress in astronomical and chronological science, as in the Mayan and Aztec peoples.¹⁰⁸

Another example of progress and religion appeared in Dawson's study of ancient Sumerian culture in *The Age of the Gods*:

The great works of irrigation, which above all rendered possible the increase of population and the growth of cities in Babylonia, involved a vast control of labour and a unity of direction to which a population of peasants could never have attained by themselves. It was the superhuman authority and the express mandate of the god that alone rendered these great communal enterprises possible. And hence we note the importance of the divinities of canals and irrigation in the early Sumerian religion.

...Each of these cities lay in the midst of its little territory, surrounded by the irrigated cornfields and gardens in which grew the famous date palms which held such an important place in the Sumerian economy, and beyond lay the pasture lands where great herds of sheep and goats and oxen grazed. All their prosperity depended upon the water supply, whether from the Euphrates direct or by means of the great canals which even in the days of Herodotus were one of the wonders of the world. It was this that rendered possible the dense population and great economic wealth of the country...and when in the Middle Ages the canal system broke down, the prosperity of Mesopotamia was destroyed....¹⁰⁹

In this passage, the outlines of Dawson's understanding of progress and religion (extended and clarified in the 1929 book) are seen: the agents of progress were human beings, but its content was determined by both the temple and the physical conditions of Sumeria. Progress depended on technological development (canals and irrigation) most immediately, but the possibility of *unity of effort* that fostered this development sprang from ancient religion. Here the contrast between Dawson and Marvin is clear. Marvin, too, recognized the necessity of united effort to achieve real social improvement: "We seem to have reached the point in history when for the first time we are really conscious of our position, and the problem is now a possible and an urgent one to mark the goal clearly and unitedly and bend our common efforts to attaining it." As seen earlier, Marvin put his faith in vague "collective forces of mankind as expressed in history" that would provide the motive power of united action.¹¹⁰ From his historical research, Dawson thought that these "collective forces" were not mysterious and undefined at all; for him, it was not Marvin's ideal of "collective forces" that built the cities of Sumeria: "It is the religious impulse which

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 87-89, 92.

¹⁰⁹ ———, *The Age of the Gods: A Study in the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient East*, 112, 121-122.

¹¹⁰ Marvin, "The Idea of Progress," 22, 23.

supplies the cohesive force which unifies a society and a culture. The great civilizations of the world do not produce the great religions as a kind of cultural by-product; in a very real sense the great religions are the foundations on which the great civilizations rest.”¹¹¹

In a 1921 article, Dawson illustrated another aspect of common spiritual influence on progress. He drew from the fourteenth-century Muslim scholar and historian of the Berbers, Ibn Khaldun. According to Khaldun, in Dawson’s words, there were two main factors in history: (1) the tribe, which was the product of the region, and (2) religion, which was a world-force. “Under the breath of a common religious inspiration the tribes are bound together into a civilization, and when the inspiration passes the tribes fall back into their natural separatism. They live on, but the civilization dies.” Thus, “Civilization is essentially the co-operation of regional societies under a common spiritual influence,” and the essential fact of progress is greater integration of the spirit of the whole civilization with the personality of the local society.¹¹² This was Dawson’s appropriate message after the internecine warfare of 1914-1918: progress is the coordination of local regions and the larger international world. Why was *regional life* so important? Because it counters the “urban distaste for the concrete” (in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s wonderful phrase¹¹³), and because without it cosmopolitan urban life cannot maintain its roots in the life of nature. “No civilization, however advanced, can afford to neglect these ultimate foundations in the life of nature and the natural region on which its social welfare depends, for even the highest achievements of science and art and economic organization are powerless to avert decay, if the vital functions of the social organism become impaired.”¹¹⁴ Here Dawson owed much to his own upbringing in rural Yorkshire, and to the Edinburgh school of sociology led by Patrick Geddes and Victor Branford, with their focus on aesthetic town planning and the environmental foundations of human life. For Dawson, then, religion helped to bind localities in a give-and-take relationship to a higher and broader civilization.

In chapter seven of *Progress and Religion*, Dawson focused on Christianity and European cultural development, a subject he would develop at length in several later

¹¹¹ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 180.

¹¹² Christopher Dawson, "On the Development of Sociology in Relation to the Theory of Progress," *Sociological Review* XIII (1921): 80, 82.

¹¹³ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 41.

¹¹⁴ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 62.

books, most notably *The Making of Europe* (1932). In contrast to the pessimistic and cyclical conceptions of reality in Greek philosophy and the Indian Upanishads, Dawson highlighted the Judeo-Christian tradition in which ritual and the importance of teleology and history, rather than metaphysical speculation, played central roles.¹¹⁵ Even the rationalist Bury recognized this distinction between Greek and Christian thought.¹¹⁶ But Dawson extended the argument to focus on the Christian belief in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, by which a new principle of divine life “entered the human race and the natural world by which mankind is raised to a higher order.” A new orientation of human beings toward each other and their God-man in Christianity, as well as this religion’s focus on the “progressive transformation of human nature,” implanted a new conception of reality vis-à-vis that of the ancient world.¹¹⁷ This teleological, transformative view of the soul and of the world, which Dawson traced through the influence of Christianity on the course of European history in the medieval ages, ultimately lay behind the very idea of Progress claimed by Bury and the eighteenth-century rationalists as their own, *contra* religion. Dawson wrote, “It must be recognized that our faith in progress and in the unique value of human experience rests on religious foundations, and that they cannot be severed from historical religion and used as a substitute for it, as men have attempted to do during the last two centuries.”¹¹⁸

What was progress for Dawson? True progress meant the growth of scientific knowledge coordinated with ethical clarity and human integration with nature. Progress meant cultural unity, which was most fundamentally a communal spiritual harmony. Unless both movements of science and spirit cooperated to produce long-term progress, degeneration was a threat. Ultimately, unless ethics and a religious conception of reality gave direction to material progress and human thought, science itself could easily become a tool against humanity and progress. “It is in vain that we look to science for a power which will unite and guide the divided forces of European society. Science provides, not a moral dynamic, but an intellectual technique,”

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 105-106, 120-122, 188.

¹¹⁶ Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, 19, 21. In fact, Bury himself was greatly interested in the transformation by Christianity of the Roman Empire and of what came to be Europe; see Bury, *The Life of St. Patrick and His Place in History*.

¹¹⁷ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 124, 129.

¹¹⁸ Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, 4; Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 188.

Dawson wrote.¹¹⁹ While he did not articulate a logic for reconciling religion and science in a progressive cultural unity, Dawson's book *Progress and Religion* raised the question of their cooperation as the foundation of true progress at a time of great public interest in their relationship.¹²⁰ Survival-of-hope thinkers ultimately rested their case only on one term: reason and its scientific expression. Dawson used historical and anthropological evidence to show that a second term in the equation had always been present in the fact of human progress: religion. Dawson ended the book with a bold call: modern people must return to the religious roots of Western culture for true progress to prevail.¹²¹

A Different Cast of Mind

Why was Dawson's perspective so different? There were at least three reasons: (1) Dawson's engagement with Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* and the theme of cultural degeneration, (2) his unique understanding of progress and agency, and (3) his perspective as an intellectual historian on ideas and their historical context.

(1) CHRISTOPHER DAWSON AND OSWALD SPENGLER. During the summer of 1908, nineteen-year-old Christopher traveled on the Continent with his father visiting Bruges, Cologne, and Strasbourg. Their final destination was Baden-Baden in the Black Forest, where Dawson was to spend some months learning German from a philologist called Herr Lenz, Dawson's biographer recounts. "Col Dawson, always an inveterate sightseer, was an exhausting traveling companion, since he liked to see all the churches, monasteries and picture galleries as soon as he arrived in a place." Later, at the Villa Lenz in Baden-Baden, Dawson "struggled unsuccessfully with German, and although he mastered it sufficiently so that he was able to read Goethe, Hegel, Troeltsch and later Spengler, he never learnt to speak it satisfactorily." Dawson became disenchanted with the Germans and their language (philology was never one of his interests). "'This country is most dreadful' he wrote to his sister from Baden 'it is really like the state of society in *Lord of the World*.' (This was Robert Hugh Benson's startling novel about the end of the world.) 'People get on so very well without religion. They do not seem bigoted like English "undenominationlists"

¹¹⁹ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 176.

¹²⁰ On religion and science in this period see Matthew Stanley, *Practical Mystic: Religion, Science, and A. S. Eddington* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), chap. 6.

¹²¹ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 188.

but they examine Christianity as if it was a kind of beetle. It is all as different as if one was living among Chinese.”¹²²

Despite his doubts as a young man of twenty, Dawson later greatly appreciated German culture, as in his chapter on Germany and Central Europe in *Understanding Europe* (1952). Three German scholars in particular made a deep impact on Dawson: the Protestant theologian and church historian Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), whose *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (1886-1889) influenced (ironically) Dawson’s conversion to Catholicism; the Protestant theologian Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), and the historian and philosopher Oswald Spengler (1880-1936). Unlike the survival-of-hope thinkers, Dawson seriously considered Spengler’s two-volume *Decline of the West*. “Hitherto,” Dawson wrote in 1922, “this work has attracted much less interest in England than elsewhere, partly no doubt on account of the difficulty of procuring German books during the latter part of the war, and indeed for some time afterward.”¹²³ Yet Dawson himself engaged with it even before the second volume appeared in German, writing an article on Spengler for *The Sociological Review* in 1922. In *Progress and Religion*, Spengler was the backbone of one chapter. And in his *Modern Dilemma* (1932), which had been broadcast on the BBC as a series of lectures, Dawson referred to Spengler’s later work *Man and Technics* (1932; published as *Der Mensch und die Technik* in 1931).

The Decline of the West was conceived before 1914 and worked out fully by 1917; post-war conditions impelled people to read it, justifying the printing of tens of thousands of copies. Spengler sought to create a true German philosophy of historical development. His fundamental questions were: What is deeper than politics and unifies our knowledge of history? What moves history forward? In his view, all the cultures of the world are independent, natural growths. These cultures “grow with the same superb aimlessness as the flowers of the field.” Civilizations are “a conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing-becoming.... They are an end, irrevocable, yet by inward necessity reached again and again.” This means that progress is an illusion: “The future of the West is not a limitless tending upwards and onwards for all time towards our present ideals, but a single phenomenon of history....”¹²⁴

¹²² Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson* (1984; New Brunswick: Transaction, 1992), 39-40.

¹²³ Dawson, “Herr Spengler and the Life of Civilisations,” 194.

¹²⁴ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson, II vols., vol. I (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1926), ix, 21, 31, 39.

Dawson shared Spengler's attention to the cyclical, biological element in human life. However, by propounding a universal explanation of all world cultures, Spengler betrayed his own relativism. He also overlooked obvious facts. History, Dawson thought, was not the story of hermetically-sealed cultural unities, but rather of cultural interaction and influence, especially through the spread of new forms of thought. Dawson wrote: "It is true that a philosopher like Aristotle, or a religious leader like Mohammed, is the offspring of a particular culture, and could not have appeared in any other land, or at any other period but his own. Nevertheless, the influence of such men far transcends cultural and racial boundaries." The reality of cultural interaction was fatal to Spengler's culture-cycles, and it "readmits the principle of causality and the opportunity for rational analysis which Spengler professes to banish for ever."¹²⁵ Dawson summarized his position thus:

There are, in fact, two movements in history; one of which is due, as Herr Spengler shows, to the life process of an individual people in contact with a definite geographical environment, while the other is common to a number of different peoples and results from intellectual and religious interaction and synthesis. Any attempt to explain history as the exclusive result of one or other of these factors is doomed to failure. Only by taking account of both these movements is it possible to understand the history of human development, and to explain the existence of the real element of continuity and integration in history which alone can justify a belief in human progress."¹²⁶

For Dawson, human life and progress always rested on a relationship to the natural world. He wrote:

We do not regard the dependence of an artist on his material as a sign of weakness and lack of skill. On the contrary, the greater the artist, the more fully does he enter into his material, and the more completely does his work conform itself to the qualities of the medium in which it is embodied. In the same way the conformity of a culture to its natural environment is no sign of barbarism. The more a culture advances, the more fully does it express itself in and through its material conditions, and the more intimate is the co-operation between man and nature."¹²⁷

Survival-of-hope thinkers, however, paid too little attention to nature as an independent reality, the health of which was crucial for human beings. They focused so much on human perfectibility and possibility that they tended to forget the human *reality* of existing in a natural environment; they failed to take seriously enough the fact that some lines of "progress" threatened that environment; they did not have an adequate theory of *degeneration*; they had not taken Spengler seriously enough. Dawson, however, had learned well the importance of the environment as a factor in history from Patrick Geddes and the Sociological Society.

¹²⁵ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 41, 42.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

(2) RELIGION AND PROGRESS. Another reason that Dawson's views differed so greatly from survival-of-hope thinkers had to do with *agency*: what or who caused development and progress (assuming progress was possible, which all six men did at this stage in their careers)? What or who was the *agent* of progress? For McCabe and Bury, it was "reason free"; for Hobhouse, a developing Mind; for Marvin and Wells, the "collective forces of mankind as expressed in history." All of these agents were seen as somehow related to but not determined by the force of evolution. This is most clearly seen in Hobhouse when he wrote of evolution as having become conscious of itself by producing the human mind, and people in the early twentieth century as being lucky to possess enough scientific knowledge to be able to direct their own evolution. In this view, the agents of progress—Man and Evolution—were fused into one movement, like a person riding but *directing* a horse. McCabe: "for the first time in the long history of life on earth unconscious evolution is becoming conscious evolution; ...the human race is at last deliberately choosing the lines of its development."¹²⁸ Marvin thought the same way, and even Bury—as quoted above—made passing reference to "moulding our evolution." Towards what goal would evolution be directed? The answer was that it all depended on the ideals human beings formed for themselves and to which they aspired. Implicit in the survival-of-hope thinkers was that these directing ideals were abstractions like Unity and Humanity or even further Progress itself. The only real problem was to educate people to a firmer intellectual grasp of the idea of Progress for its continuation to be assured.

For Christopher Dawson, the ultimate agent of progress was not Conscious Evolution, "Collective Forces," or the idea of Progress; it was the Alpha and the Omega, the One who created the beginning and the end as the very foundation for the possibility of progress. "Unless men believe that they have an all-powerful ally outside time, they will inevitably abandon the ideal of a supernatural or anti-natural moral progress and make the best of the world as they find it, conforming themselves to the law of self-interest and self-preservation which governs the rest of nature."¹²⁹ He quoted from the early second-century BC *Ecclesiastes*: "That which hath been is that which shall be; and that which hath been done is that which shall be done: and

¹²⁸ McCabe, *Can We Save Civilisation?*, 234. See also: Joseph McCabe, *The A B C of Evolution* (London: Watts, 1920), 106.

¹²⁹ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 28.

there is no new thing under the sun.”¹³⁰ One finds such cyclical thinking, Dawson wrote, in the Greeks, in Babylonia, Syria, Mesopotamia, India, China—indeed, the doctrine of the Great Year, the cyclical nature of history—was the common possession of all the great civilizations of the ancient world and even continued into the modern world.¹³¹ However, despite *Ecclesiastes*, to the Hebrew religion history possessed a unique and absolute value “such as no other people of antiquity had conceived. ...While the philosophers of India and Greece were meditating on the illusoriness or the eternity of the cosmic process, the prophets of Israel were affirming the moral purpose in history and were interpreting the passing events of their age as the revelation of the divine will.”¹³² Christianity grew out of this radically historico-centric view of reality, and based itself not on a mythological figure or abstract cosmic principles, but on a historic person: Jesus Christ. For Dawson, “the life of the Church consists in the progressive extension of the Incarnation by the gradual incorporation of mankind into [a] higher unity.”¹³³ At the end of the book he wrote: “It must be recognized that our faith in progress and in the unique value of human experience rests on religious foundations, and that they cannot be severed from historical religion and used as a substitute for it, as men have attempted to do during the last two centuries.” Why? Because “a religion without Revelation is a religion without History, and it is just the historical element in Christianity which gives it its peculiar character....”¹³⁴

(3) DAWSON AS INTELLECTUAL HISTORIAN. If Marxists tended to reduce the historical process to material factors, Dawson wrote, then the rationalist idealism of the Liberal Enlightenment tended to the opposite extreme. “This Liberal idealism is marked by a belief in an absolute Law of Progress and an unlimited faith in the power of reason to transform society. Concepts such as Liberty, Science, Reason and Justice are

¹³⁰ ———, “Christianity and the Idea of Progress,” 23. *Ecclesiastes* 1:9.

¹³¹ ———, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 115.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 123.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 188. The American sociologist Robert Nisbet (1913-1996) later developed a position on religion and progress similar to Dawson’s: “It was belief in the sacred and the mythological that in the beginning of Western history made possible belief in and assimilation of ideas of time, history, development, and either progress or regress. Only on the basis of confidence in the existence of a divine power was confidence possible with respect to design or pattern in the world and in the history of the world. In the beginning all knowledge was sacred by virtue of its content—the divine, the mythological. It was persistence of this sense of the sacredness of knowledge that accorded the arts and sciences high status in Western civilization long after they had ceased to be concerned solely with the gods.” Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (London: Heinemann, 1980), 355.

conceived, not as abstract ideas, but as real forces which determine the movement of culture, and social progress itself, instead of being regarded as a phenomenon that requires explanation, is treated as itself the efficient cause of social change.”¹³⁵ Though survival of hope thinkers did not believe in a *law* of progress, ideas were the focus. Thus, for Wells, “Human history is in essence a history of ideas....” For Bury, “ideas rule the world.”¹³⁶ The idea of Progress, a fortuitous discovery of the modern world, was the ultimate principle for Bury, upon the basis of which he viewed the rest of history. Dawson commented on the eighteenth-century rationalist philosophers who “hypostatized human reason into a principle of world development.”¹³⁷ This was precisely what the later believers in Progress did—and with increased insistence after the Great War—because they desired so strongly to find an ultimate universal ideal to inspire action in the service of social renewal. Ideas, for them, were self-creative abstractions. Thus, the philosopher and classical scholar John Alexander Smith, who published the fascinating “Progress as an Ideal of Action” in Marvin’s *Progress and History* (1916), asserted several times as a self-sufficient axiom “that what is or can be an ideal of action for us must be wholly and solely of our own making, the very thought of it self-begotten in our mind, every step to its actual existence the self-created deed of our own will.”¹³⁸ Thus McCabe: “We are the factors of evolution today. We are the masters and the creators. Let us get the plan right and forge ahead.”¹³⁹ For Bury and the others, except for Dawson, the intrinsic goodness of the self-created idea of Progress seemed to guarantee a new and continually improving human community.

For an intellectual historian such as Bury there was a tendency to treat ideas as things-in-themselves. Examining Bury’s position on the nature of ideas more closely, it is true one finds that he warned against treating ideas as things-in-themselves. While it is, he said, intelligible to speak of certain ideas as controlling (in the sense of all-pervading), in a given period—for instance, the idea of nationality, or the idea of Progress—from the “scientific point of view,” such ideas had no existence outside the

¹³⁵ Christopher Dawson, “Sociology as a Science,” in *Science Today: The Scientific Outlook on World Problems Explained by Leading Exponents of Modern Scientific Thought*, ed. J. Arthur Thomson and J. G. Crowther (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1934), 165.

¹³⁶ Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, 1; Wells, *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind*, 748.

¹³⁷ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 26, 31.

¹³⁸ J. A. Smith, “Progress as an Ideal of Action,” in *Progress and History*, ed. F. S. Marvin (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), 301.

¹³⁹ McCabe, *The A B C of Evolution*, 106.

minds of individuals. They were psychical forces, and a historical “idea,” if it did not exist in this form, was merely a way of expressing a synthesis of the historian himself.¹⁴⁰ Here Bury made an excellent point, anticipating Quentin Skinner, an intellectual historian of today, who has warned of the dangers of the “histories of ideas” and their tendency to hypostasize the key idea or doctrine into an entity.¹⁴¹ In practice, however, Bury fell into the trap that he had warned against—and Skinner criticized him for it. Bury treated Progress as a thing-in-itself, an “it” in his book; he spoke of those who “did not hit upon” it or of the “obstacles to its appearance” that did not fall away until the sixteenth century.¹⁴² But, as Skinner points out, “ideas presuppose agents.”¹⁴³ Of course, strictly speaking, Bury would have agreed—ideas exist in the mind of people; but, from where did the people get the idea? How did thinking *before* the eighteenth century relate to the idea of Progress? Bury did not say. He left the impression that Progress created itself.

Dawson, with a different conception of the nature of ideas, attacked idealistic history because it left no room for the contribution of the biologist and the anthropologist. Indeed, “Every culture rests on a foundation of geographical environment and racial inheritance, which conditions its highest activities. The change of culture is not simply a change of thought, it is above all a change of life.”¹⁴⁴ Dawson’s attitude toward the nature of ideas was well-expressed by a phrase of the American sociologist Charles Ellwood (1873-1946): “our ideas, ideals, and values must be so expanded that they include, and give adequate recognition to, the material conditions of life.”¹⁴⁵ For Dawson, abstract ideas and human reason were not world-forces or ultimate determinants; for him, *thought* always took place within a context, a common discourse of the times and a general belief about reality. For Dawson, history was not simply the history of ideas; it was the history of culture, of ideas-in-context, of rational human beings existing in an environment, of human beings oriented toward the world and each other by way of their fundamental beliefs and religion.

¹⁴⁰ J. B. Bury, “Darwinism and History,” in *Selected Essays of J. B. Bury*, ed. Harold Temperley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930). Originally published in: A. C. Seward, *Darwinism and Modern Science* (Cambridge University Press, 1909): 529-42

¹⁴¹ Skinner, *Regarding Method*, 62.

¹⁴² *Ibid*; Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, 7.

¹⁴³ Skinner, *Regarding Method*, 62.

¹⁴⁴ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 45.

¹⁴⁵ Charles A. Ellwood, “The Social Problem and the Present War,” *Sociological Review* VIII (1915): 12.

Religion of Progress?

Perhaps *hope* is a kind of knowledge or faith by which we can “face our present: the present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey.”¹⁴⁶ The Great War did not end hope in Progress. The underlying message of the rationalist survival-of-hope thinkers after the war was that assurance of continued progress depended on clutching tightly to the *idea* of Progress, that the idea itself would motivate the continued fact of progress. McCabe and Marvin looked to the history of that “Century of Hope” of peace and economic expansion—the nineteenth—as a buttress to their hopes.¹⁴⁷ Hobhouse affirmed that for the first time in history, modern civilization had the ability to rationally direct itself; the future would be hopeful, he thought, if people could only grasp this ideal, this hope, of rational self-direction with enough confidence. Nevertheless, confidence was not enough: “The conception of a self-directed development of mind in man has been apprehended in abstract terms [e.g., by Hobhouse himself], but no prophet has arisen who can give it that full concrete imaginative statement which would convert it into a guiding force.”¹⁴⁸

Dawson, too, looked to the prophetic-type for guiding force, not Hobhouse’s secular prophet, but to the religious prophet like Mohammad or Jesus Christ—those who had actually changed the course of history by expounding a new hope. For Dawson, it was not enough to grasp with intellectual confidence the idea of Progress to ensure the fact of progress. Rather, the ultimate motivating force for progress lay in something deeper: a certain teleological, transformative, and religious conception of reality that incarnated itself into the common ways of life (cultures) of peoples through both religion and science.

Dawson wrote in *Progress and Religion* that, “Every living culture must possess some spiritual dynamic, which provides the energy necessary for that sustained social effort which is civilization. Normally this dynamic is supplied by a religion, but in exceptional circumstances the religious impulse may disguise itself under philosophical or political forms.”¹⁴⁹ Later, referring to the rationalist idealism which

¹⁴⁶ Benedict XVI, “*Spe Salvi*,” www.vatican.va (accessed 4 December 2007), par. 1.

¹⁴⁷ McCabe, *1825-1925: A Century of Stupendous Progress*; F. S. Marvin, *The Century of Hope: A Sketch of Western Progress from 1815 to the Great War*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1919).

¹⁴⁸ Hobhouse, *Social Development: Its Nature and Conditions*, 339, 340.

¹⁴⁹ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 3-4.

treated ideas as agents, he wrote: “Beliefs of this kind are religious rather than sociological, as Pareto has shown in the incisive criticism of his *Trattato de sociologia generale*. Nevertheless, they still exercise a powerful influence on popular sociology, and they are not altogether absent from the theories of such distinguished modern writers as the late Professors L. T. Hobhouse and Lester Ward.”¹⁵⁰

While it may not be fair to refer, for example, to McCabe’s thinking as “religious,” statements already quoted do give one reason to pause, as when he wrote: “Science has, in fact, explained itself. ...It is simply the human mind passing rapidly to a higher level of intelligence. ...Its province is the whole of reality.” While it is not immediately obvious how one could prove that the province of science is the whole of reality, such a statement by McCabe helps the reader understand why chapter seven of his 1925 book was called: “Science the Redeemer.” Science and Progress were the principles of unity in McCabe’s thought—the ultimate realities; their intrinsic goodness seemed to guarantee a future of continual development toward a more perfect human community.

For Bury, religion blocked the rise of Progress because it kept human beings focused on another world. Thus, it was not until “men felt independent of Providence that they could organise a theory of Progress.”¹⁵¹ However, in regards to this position, one reviewer wrote that “it is not easy to see why Mr. Bury should regard it [belief in Progress] as inconsistent with the belief in Providence. ...While Mr. Bury is justified in pointing out how some Christian conceptions (not the most important ones) have acted as barriers against advances, he does less than justice to Christianity as regards its influence on the doctrine in other ways. ...Many theists will be surprised at being told that there is any difficulty at all [of reconciling the two conceptions].”¹⁵² Another noted that Bury “nowhere examines the question of the relation between the idea of providence and that of progress. He does not even attempt a demonstration of the incompatibility of the two conceptions, but simply assumes it to be a fact.”¹⁵³ Despite these questionable assumptions, Bury nevertheless wrote of the idea of Progress as

¹⁵⁰ ———, “Sociology as a Science,” 165-166. Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) was an Italian industrialist, sociologist, philosopher, and economist. His famous *Tratto di sociologia generale* (1916) was translated into English as *The Mind and Society* (1935). Lester Ward (1841-1913) was an American botanist, paleontologist, and sociologist.

¹⁵¹ Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, 73.

¹⁵² Benecke: 583.

¹⁵³ Daniel Sommer Robinson, review of *The Idea of Progress*, *Philosophical Review* XXX (1921): 530. See also Benecke: 583.

“the animating and controlling idea of western civilisation,” an idea that bore upon the mystery of life such as Providence or personal immortality. Progress could not be proved true or false; “Belief in it is an act of faith.”¹⁵⁴

Others were more explicit. The then agnostic classical scholar Gilbert Murray (1866-1957) wrote in 1922: “And as to Progress, it is no doubt a real fact. To many of us it is a truth that lies somewhere near the roots of our religion.”¹⁵⁵ Marvin, referring to the evolving human mind as the hope of salvation for humanity, wrote that, “If not itself a religion, such an attitude has a profound religious root.”¹⁵⁶ Wells predicted that the “impulse to devotion, to universal service and to a complete escape from self,” the underlying forces of the great religions, “will reappear again, stripped and plain, as the recognized fundamental structural impulse in human society.”¹⁵⁷

“Progress as an Ideal of Action” was written by the Scottish-born idealist philosopher and classical scholar John Alexander Smith (1863-1939), who enunciated a secular hope during the Great War. This hope he found in the essential goodness of humanity: the war was a real evil, but the store of good in human beings was such that even this evil would be converted to the good of self-knowledge. By learning from its past, humanity could convert its misdeeds and evils into good by incorporating them into a growing store of self-knowledge. In this way, we could *forgive us ourselves* our own trespasses. And human beings could save themselves by setting before themselves a true ideal of action, an ideal created by them but also observed in nature and history. “Unless we learn to see Progress as universal and omnipresent and omnipotent, we shall set before ourselves ideals of action which are false and treacherous.”¹⁵⁸ He continued: “For the basis and ground of our belief in the reality, and therefore the eternity, of Progress lies in this, that the now known nature of the Spirit which is in Man and not in Man alone, is that it can heal any wounds that it can inflict upon itself, can find in its own errors and failures, in its own mistakes and misdeeds, if it only will, the materials of a richer and fuller life.”¹⁵⁹

Smith was not alone in his belief in the natural goodness of human beings. Though Bury cast doubt on it in his personal views, still “you have not got the idea of Progress

¹⁵⁴ Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, vii, 1, 4.

¹⁵⁵ Gilbert Murray, “Religio Grammatici: The Religion of a ‘Man of Letters’,” in *Essays and Addresses* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1922), 19.

¹⁵⁶ F. S. Marvin, *The New Vision of Man* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938), 164.

¹⁵⁷ Wells, *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind*, 751.

¹⁵⁸ Smith, “Progress as an Ideal of Action,” 310.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 307, 314.

until you...conceive that [civilization] is destined to advance indefinitely in the future.”¹⁶⁰ Hobhouse, as already quoted, was noted for his belief in man’s salvation in Man; for Marvin (quoted above), “The end is a more perfect man, developed by the perfecting of all mankind.” Wells: “we believe in the power of reason and in the increasing good-will in men.”¹⁶¹ Belief in the possibility of human perfectibility pervaded the work of survival-of-hope thinkers.

The search for a secular *hope* was the ultimate question that united McCabe, Hobhouse, Marvin, Wells, and Bury. Even after the Great War, especially after the Great War, these men continued writing of the old hope in Progress because they saw it as the key to moving people to action in the pursuit of knowledge and social betterment. Indeed, Sidney Pollard, in his *The Idea of Progress*, wrote that for modern people, “belief in progress is a spiritual necessity, because we need to believe in spiritual progress. Its very uncertainty supplies the spring for our action, for something completely predetermined ceases to have any moral meaning.”¹⁶²

Dawson, in his chapter toward the end of *Progress and Religion* called “The Rise of the Religion of Progress,” wrote of the Enlightenment thinkers: “Thus the belief in the moral perfectibility and the indefinite progress of the human race took the place of the Christian faith in the life of the world to come, as the final goal of human effort.” The idea of Progress dominated the three main currents of European thought in the nineteenth century: Rationalist Liberalism, Revolutionary Socialism, and Transcendental Idealism. “It evoked all the enthusiasm and faith of a genuine religion,” he noted.¹⁶³

From the evidence of this chapter, it is clear that the hope of the nineteenth century survived the Great War along with the older generation and characterized the most important writers on the question of progress in the 1920s; it rested on their fundamental assumptions about science, agency, and human perfectibility.

Nevertheless, at least Bury’s faith in Progress was not completely secure in 1920. In his Introduction to *The Idea of Progress* he questioned whether civilization actually progressed in a desirable direction. For Bury, this was not a question that could be proved either way; the idea of Progress was the assumption of a direction.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, 4, 7.

¹⁶¹ Wells, *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind*, 751.

¹⁶² Sidney Pollard, *The Idea of Progress: History and Society* (London: C. A. Watts, 1968), 202.

¹⁶³ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 149, 157.

¹⁶⁴ Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, 2, 4.

Shockingly, at the very end of his book, he mused: “does not Progress itself suggest that its value as a doctrine is only relative, corresponding to a certain not very advanced stage of civilisation...?”¹⁶⁵ He was not sure, although his very language of doubt seemed to betray an underlying conviction of advance. Was Bury making fun of pessimism (or of optimism!) and having the last laugh?

Despite these slight doubts, Bury endured among the last denizens of Progress at the end of the long line of confident rationalist thinkers he so well illuminated in his book *The Idea of Progress*. After Bury, it would be impossible for a writer to simply trace the origin and growth of the idea of Progress without addressing the question of its *validity* in a new post-war era of thought—even McCabe was very aware of the problem of pessimism in the mid twenties, if only to ridicule it. Bury stood at a transition point, looking backward across the great vista of progress without clearly apprehending the end of an era, *his* era. McCabe, Hobhouse, Marvin, Wells, Bury—these men were the older generation, all born in the 1860s. Bury and Hobhouse were both reared by clerical fathers, Marvin was the son of a churchwarden and planned to enter the clergy as a young man—but all five rejected traditional religion and embraced Progress as something like a religion.¹⁶⁶

Though some critical attention in Britain to the idea of Progress had preceded the war,¹⁶⁷ the emotional impact of the war and its aftermath raised difficult questions about social and historical development. Because of these questions, the post-war years witnessed a surge of interest in—and justification of—the *idea* of Progress itself among prominent intellectuals. Perhaps, however, the very attempt to analyze the idea was itself a sign of etiolation. Reflecting primarily on the post-war literature of Progress, Dawson wrote in 1929: “If at the present day it is at last possible to trace the history of the idea of Progress and to understand the part that it has played in the development of modern civilization, it is to a great extent because the phase of civilization of which it was characteristic is already beginning to pass away. ...[We] are witnessing...the dawn of a new age.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 352.

¹⁶⁶ The idea of Progress as a kind of religion was even more clear in Julian Huxley, “Progress, Biological and Other,” in *Essays of a Biologist* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1923). For Huxley, the biological basis of the doctrine of Progress could satisfy the deepest needs of man for confidence and hope in something greater than himself; such belief would become part of the “common theology of the future” (61).

¹⁶⁷ J. S. Mackenzie, “The Idea of Progress,” *International Journal of Ethics* IX (1898/1899).

¹⁶⁸ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 15-16.

Through Dawson's critique of the rationalist and progressive account of history he attempted to supply a new history to that new age, an environmental, sociological, and religious account of history as potentially both regressive and progressive. *Human beings in their environments* were the agents of historical change, not ideas-in-themselves. Therefore, the cultural context of past humans and the traditions of thought by which they came to their ideas became the objects of historical study. This shift in focus away from abstract ideas was an important foundation of Dawson's challenge to the British historiography of his day and his own work on a history of culture.

CHAPTER FOUR

Historiography

"The problems of historiography are at certain points closely connected with the problems of life."—Herbert Butterfield (1955)¹

Chapter two showed that Dawson was critical of the propagandist or “nostalgic history” of the Middle Ages that could easily be used as a weapon against the modern world or to exult religious or nationalist ideals. On the other hand, chapter three accounted for Dawson’s critique of the opposite tendency: the use of the past to exult the present age and its ideas of progress. “There is some justification for this in the case of a writer like Mr. H. G. Wells,” Dawson wrote, “whose object it is to provide the modern man with an historical background and a basis for his view of the world; but even at the best this way of writing history is fundamentally unhistorical...and instead of liberating the mind from provincialism by widening the intellectual horizon, it is apt to generate the Pharisaic self-righteousness of the Whig historians....” Instead, Dawson thought, history should be the great corrective to the “parochialism in time” which “Bertrand Russell rightly describes as one of the great faults of our modern society.”²

If not the glories of a past age or the glories of the modern age, what did Dawson propose to study in history? What was the “object of study” in Dawson’s historical writing? The answer was *culture*, the common way of life of a people. To what questions did Dawson propose “the history of culture” to be the answer? In other words, what historiographical problems were resolved for Dawson by his attention to culture?

¹ Herbert Butterfield, *Man on His Past: The Study of the History of Historical Scholarship* (1955; Boston: Beacon, 1960), 30.

² Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity* (1932; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 4. See: Bertrand Russell, “On Being Modern Minded,” in *Unpopular Essays*, by Bertrand Russell (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1950).

There were many strands of historiography in Britain between the wars. G. P. Gooch³ turned from his pre-war interest in the history of ideas and historiography to diplomatic history after the Great War, becoming a leading expert on the origins of the war. H. A. L. Fisher⁴ and R. B. Mowat⁵ were also well-known political historians between the wars. Others turned to a new economic history, such as R. H. Tawney (whose work helped give an historical narrative to the new Labour Party) and Eileen Power (who will be discussed below). F. S. Marvin, introduced in chapter three, campaigned for the history of science. During the war and the 1920s, education debates sought ways to link scientific training with the traditional ideal of a moral, liberal education by historicizing science.⁶ G. M. Trevelyan, also discussed below, continued his family's literary Whig tradition of liberal, narrative-historical writing focused on national politics, if in a more subdued form after the Great War. Herbert Butterfield,⁷ Lewis Namier,⁸ and the conservative tradition of historical writing (e.g.,

³ George Peabody Gooch (1873-1968); b. Kensington, London; his father was a merchant banker; graduated from the history tripos at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1894; Liberal MP for Bath 1906-1910; his publications included *The History of English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century* (1898) and *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (1913), the popular textbook *History of Modern Europe, 1878-1919* (1923), *Recent Revelations of European Diplomacy* (1927), and *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914* (1938); 1923-1926 he was president of the Historical Association of Great Britain; elected to the British Academy in 1926; remained a member of the Church of England through his life; see entry by Frank Eyck, ODNB (accessed 10 April 2009).

⁴ Herbert Albert Laurens Fisher (1865-1940); b. in London; father was a barrister by profession but during Fisher's childhood was the private secretary to the prince of Wales; Fisher had many famous connections: F. W. Maitland was a brother-in-law, Leslie Stephen was an uncle, Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf were cousins, and Gilbert Murray was a close friend; served as president of the Board of Education under the Prime Minister David Lloyd George and supported the Education Act (1918) which determined the character of public education between the world wars; published, among other works, volume V of Longman's *Political History of England* (1906) covering the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII, and *History of Europe* (3 vols., 1935), which was infused with a liberal humanitarianism and was an instant best-seller; received the Order of Merit in 1937; was a rationalist in personal convictions; see entry by A. Ryan, ODNB (accessed 10 April 2009).

⁵ Robert Balmain Mowat (1883-1941); b. in Edinburgh; father was a bookseller who became managing director of Edinburgh publishers W. and R. Chambers; worked in the naval intelligence department 1915-1918; lecturer in history at Oxford and then Professor of Modern History at Bristol (1928-1941); his magnum opus was *A History of European Diplomacy* (3 vols., 1922, 1927, 1928), covering the years 1451-1925; he also published, among others: *The Age of Reason* (1934), *Europe in Crisis* (1936), and contributions to international theory such as *International Relations* (1931); R. B. Mowat was the father of Charles Loch Mowat (1911-1970), also a historian best-known for his *Britain between the Wars, 1918-1940* (1955); see entry by Derek Drinkwater, ODNB (accessed 10 April 2009).

⁶ A. K. Mayer, "Moralizing Science: the Uses of Science's Past in National Education in the 1920s," *British Journal for the History of Science* XXX (1997): 52-53.

⁷ Sir Herbert Butterfield (1900-1979); b. in Oxenhope, Yorkshire; father was chief clerk at a Keighley woollen mill; studied history at Peterhouse, Cambridge; wrote *The Historical Novel* (1924) as a defence of the historical imagination (in his early career he tried to reconcile J. B. Bury's scientific history with Trevelyan's literary approach); the book that made him famous was his attack on *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931); however, later in his career he wrote whiggish history himself, as in *The Englishman and His History* (1944); in 1949 he published his well-known *Origins of Modern Science, 1300-1800* and *Christianity and History*; elected to the British Academy in 1965; appointed

F. J. C. Hearnshaw and Keith Feiling)⁹ critiqued that liberal and Whig tradition and offered various alternatives. R. G. Collingwood¹⁰ offered idealist history, and Christopher Dawson his history of culture, as critiques of the empirical tradition of British historical writing. Figures such as H. G. Wells, Arnold Toynbee,¹¹ and to some extent Dawson inaugurated a new “world history” that was motivated by a sense of crisis after the Great War and the questions raised first by Nietzsche and then by

regius professor of modern history at Cambridge, 1963-1968; see entry by Brendan Simms, ODNB (accessed 10 April 2009).

⁸ Sir Lewis Namier (1888-1960); b. in Russian Poland; father was a lawyer; Namier was of gentry and Jewish stock; arrived in London 1907 and studied at Oxford; he was noted for brilliancy; possessed little interest in any religion; after publishing *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (1929) and *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (1930), he took the chair of modern history at Manchester; elected to the British Academy in 1944; see the entry by John Cannon, ODNB (accessed 10 April 2009). The historical method established by Namier “turned on a severe reliance on the scrutiny of individuals as central historical actors and the power of individual biography to explain events without recourse to sociological or ideological structures.” In *The Structure of Politics* he examined his subject at the atomized level of individuals and families rather than the engagement of Whig and Tory principles. See Michael Bentley, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), 118.

⁹ Fossey John Cobb Hearnshaw (1869-1946), historian of politics and ideas, author of, for example, *A Survey of Socialism: Analytical, Historical and Critical* (1928); Sir Keith Grahame Feiling (1884-1977), political historian, author of, for example, *Toryism: A Political Dialogue* (1913) and *A History of the Tory Party, 1640-1714* (1924); for a study of the conservative historians, see Reba N. Soffer, *History, Historians, and Conservatism in Britain and America: The Great War to Thatcher and Reagan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Robin George Collingwood (1889-1943), philosopher and historian; b. in Lancashire into a poor but highly cultivated family; father was a writer, painter, and archaeologist who had served as secretary and later biographer of John Ruskin; worked as archaeologist and taught philosophy at Pembroke College; published *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* with J. N. L. Myres in 1936; his lifework was for rapprochement between history and philosophy, and the ideas which he developed during the 1930s on history appeared especially in *An Autobiography* (1939), and posthumously in *The Idea of History* (1946), and *The Principles of History* (1999); he established history as a form of knowledge; history was the interpretation of purposive action; his famous phrase was that “all history is the history of thought”; although he repudiated the title of “idealist,” that tradition best defined his work as a whole; he was elected to the British Academy in 1934, and he remained a committed but unorthodox Anglican throughout his life; see entry by Stefan Collini and Bernard Williams, ODNB (accessed 10 April 2009).

¹¹ Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889-1975), b. in London; father was the district secretary of the Charity Organization Society and the younger brother of the reforming thinker Arnold Toynbee (1852-1883) after whom Toynbee Hall in London, and A. J. Toynbee, were named; 1911-1912 young Toynbee traveled in Italy and Greece and had one of a series of mystical visions of the past on the site of the battle of Cynoscephalae (197 BC); he seemed destined to be a classical scholar but the Great War changed the course of his life; excused from military service he emerged during the war as a commentator on international affairs; in 1920 two key events occurred: he later recorded reading Oswald Spengler’s *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918) in that year, and he delivered the lecture “The Tragedy of Greece” in Oxford in May on the great achievements that are civilizations and that civilization itself cannot be taken for granted, thus raising themes which his later work would develop; responsiveness to contemporary events was at all times a primary characteristic of his mind; from 1926 he worked as director of studies at the Royal Institute of International Affairs where he published each year a volume of the *Survey of International Affairs* between 1925 and 1938—an extraordinary exercise in contemporary history; he began preparing for his *Study of History* (12 vols., 1934-1961) in 1930; its subject would be civilizations in world history because the “national state” had always been part of a larger whole and not a satisfactory object of study; the 1946 two-volume abridgement (by D. C. Somervell) sold hundreds of thousands of copies; elected to the British Academy in 1937; see entry by Fergus Millar, ODNB (accessed 10 April 2009).

Oswald Spengler on the “eternal recurrence” of historical cycles.¹² In short, the transition from the political and literary history of the nineteenth century to an interdisciplinary social history was slower in Britain than in France, Germany, and the United States. However, after the Great War this “new history” did emerge clearly in figures such as Tawney, Power, and Dawson.

This chapter is not a comprehensive survey of all of these trends in British historiography between the wars. Such an encyclopaedic approach would have little value. Rather, the method will be comparative, relating Dawson to several historians in the interest of illuminating three key problems that motivated Dawson’s historiography. As John Lukacs writes: “If the principal task of historians is, as this writer thinks it is, to deal with the history of certain problems rather than with that of certain periods, such a comparative approach is indeed necessary.”¹³ The interdisciplinary and comparative approach of the intellectual historian does not necessitate mastery of all fields, but the selection of materials, conceptions, and methods from any one of several disciplines in the approach to particular problems. “It is in terms of such topical ‘problems,’ rather than in accordance with academic boundaries, that specialization ought to occur,” C. Wright Mills wrote.¹⁴ The pivotal problem that this chapter will “specialize” in is this: What was Dawson *doing* in his historiography?

Besides comparison, the strategy in attempting to answer this question will involve building up the historical context around three historiographical problems that Dawson responded to, presented in this chapter in three “episodes” of British

¹² Paul Costello, *World Historians and Their Goals: Twentieth-Century Answers to Modernism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993). Dawson was only a “world historian” in a very qualified sense. In 1938 he wrote: “There is as yet no history of humanity, since humanity is not an organized society with a common tradition or a common social consciousness. All the attempts that have hitherto been made to write a world history have been in fact attempts to interpret one tradition in terms of another, attempts to extend the intellectual hegemony of a dominant culture by subordinating to it all the events of other cultures that come within the observer’s range of vision. The more learned and conscientious a historian is, the more conscious he is of the relativity of his own knowledge, and the more ready he is to treat the culture that he is studying as an end in itself, an autonomous world which follows its own laws and owes no allegiance to the standards and ideals of another civilization. For history deals with civilizations and cultures rather than civilization, with the development of particular societies and not with the progress of humanity.” See Christopher Dawson, “The Kingdom of God and History,” in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1956; Wilmington: ISI Books, 2002), 286.

¹³ John Lukacs, *The Last European War: September 1939-December 1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 479.

¹⁴ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 142.

historiography. The common point of reference, or the Venn intersection, of these episodes, is Dawson's concept of culture.

Episode 1: Dawson sought to bridge the division he perceived between political historians and ecclesiastical historians, secular history and religious history. That project drew him to the concept of culture in its anthropological sense as a common way of life. Because "culture" was for him both secular and religious, it could serve as a shared space between too often mutually exclusive histories. Episode 1 will study Dawson in relation to other Catholic historians in England (Lord Acton, Hilaire Belloc, and David Knowles), examining the kinds of religious history they wrote. This will demonstrate how he sought to put ecclesiastical history in conversation with a broader cultural and religious history. Episode 2: A second problem Dawson addressed in his historiography was the over-emphasis of political history in the context of *nationalism*. What other community besides the nation could be the object of study for the historian? Dawson's answer was the *cultural community*, but what was that exactly and from where did he draw his idea of culture? This episode will study Dawson in relation to G. M. Tevelyan and Eileen Power and their objects of historical study after the Great War. Episode 3: The emphasis on political history rested uncritically on the assumption that the "state" was a value. Thus, nationalist history could be legitimated as "objective" in so far as it studied the history of states with the scientific methods of "empirical history." The ideals of empirical history, associated with Lord Acton and J. B. Bury, were specialization and archival research. The idealization of these methods in turn came to rest on an assumed theory of knowledge whereby one could objectively view the past and test the veracity of an historical account simply by its correspondence to "the facts." Dawson sought to broaden the epistemological foundation of empirical history in order to justify the "cultural turn" that he was trying to make.

All three of these episodes study past *historiography*. The word "historiography" means "written history" or "the writing of history."¹⁵ Although Thomas Buckle (1821-1862) and Lord Acton had paid considerable attention to the history of historical writing,¹⁶ the first serious contextual study of modern historiography by an

¹⁵ OED, "historiography" (accessed 16 July 2009).

¹⁶ Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England* (2 vols., 1857, 1861); Lord Acton, *Essays in the Study and Writing of History*, ed. J. Rufus Fears, vol. II, *Selected Writings of Lord Acton* (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1986). For a useful history of the study of historiography which

historian in Britain was G. P. Gooch's *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (1913). The subject then fell into obscurity for decades, illuminated only sparsely by Herbert Butterfield's *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931) and two later works.¹⁷ R. G. Collingwood's *The Idea of History* (1946) was essentially a study of Western historiography from the Greeks and Romans onward. Dawson himself often used historiography as a window into the thought of the past, as in his consideration of Voltaire's *Siècle de Louis XIV* in *Progress and Religion* (1929).¹⁸ However, until around 1970, the subject "historiography" was seen as interesting but only secondary to the discipline of history. Nevertheless, since then "postmodernism" has given rise to a revolution in the status of historiography and the exciting opportunity for students of history to rethink their discipline.¹⁹ The study of historiography is valuable, Herbert Butterfield wrote, because one can glimpse the "subtle and manifold ways in which a whole miscellany of unexpected conditioning circumstances have helped to mould the historical mind in one period and another." He continued: "It is through the neglect of this self-discipline that in one age after another history operates to confirm the prevailing fallacies and ratify the favourite errors of the time—even magnifying prejudices at each stage of the story by projecting them back upon the canvas of all the centuries."²⁰

The study of historiography can be understood as a "creative act of evocation intended to suggest why historical writing turned out the way it did at the time and in the culture that it did."²¹ A work of history, for example G. P. Gooch's *Germany* (1925), is necessarily about a period of history prior to its composition. However, since its publication, Gooch's book has itself become an historical artefact, a product

includes helpful comments on methods in the study of past histories, see chapter one of Butterfield, *Man on His Past: The Study of the History of Historical Scholarship*.

¹⁷ Herbert Butterfield, *The Englishman and His History* (1944; Archon Books, 1970); Butterfield, *Man on His Past: The Study of the History of Historical Scholarship*.

¹⁸ Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry* (1929; Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 19-20. See also his studies of Augustine (1930), Gibbon (1934), and Marx (1934), republished in Christopher Dawson, *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1956; Wilmington: ISI Books, 2002). Dawson also wrote about historical writers contemporary with himself, such as Spengler (1922), Wells (1951), and Toynbee (1955) in articles that also reappeared in *Dynamics of World History*.

¹⁹ Bentley, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction*, viii-ix. See also Michael Bentley, ed., *Companion to Historiography* (London: Routledge, 1997); Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism 1870-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Adam Budd, ed., *The Modern Historiography Reader* (London: Routledge, 2009).

²⁰ Butterfield, *Man on His Past: The Study of the History of Historical Scholarship*, 23.

²¹ Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism 1870-1970*, 12.

of a particular time and influenced by certain perspectives and questions that arose in that time (the early 1920s).²² One of the goals of intellectual history, especially when applied to historiography, “is a revelation of the presumptions and organizing principles that historians bring to a particular study.”²³ The study of past historiography is the interpretation by a twenty-first century historian of past historical works (e.g., during the interwar period) in relation to certain problems and themes that arose for the authors in the historical context of their time. By reading historians of the past *at different levels* (textual, contextual, biographical), one can try to “get behind the historians” to identify outside factors and external events influencing them. This will then lead to identification of common problems recognized by multiple historians (that may not have known or cared about each other), allowing one to relate disparate works of history around those problems so that they become more than a random collection of texts.

Episode 1: Catholic Historians in England and Their Religious History

In 1932 Dawson wrote in the Introduction to his *Making of Europe* that, “This [book] is not a history of the Church or a history of Christianity; it is a history of a culture....”²⁴ Throughout his many books he consciously attempted to write a religious history that was more than simply ecclesiastical history of a particular church. In 1950 he wrote:

On the one side, the scientific historian has concentrated his researches on the criticism of sources and documents; on the other, the student of Christianity has devoted himself to the history of dogma and ecclesiastical institutions, with the result that we have a number of highly developed separate studies—political history, constitutional history, and economic history, on the one side, and ecclesiastical history, the history of dogma, and liturgiology on the other. But the vital subject of the creative interaction of religion and culture in the life of

²² Such questions included, for example, the need to understand Germany’s responsibility for the Great War and the struggle over reparations afterward; G. P. Gooch, *Germany* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1925), see the Introduction and chapter XII. This book was part of a new series called *The Modern World: A Survey of Historical Forces*, edited by H. A. L. Fisher. The advertisement at the front of Gooch’s book read: “The aim of the volumes in this series is to provide a balanced survey...of the tendencies and forces, political, economic, intellectual, which are moulding the lives of contemporary states.” It listed Gooch’s book and *Ireland*, by Stephen Gwynn, as already published, with nine more in preparation. In his Introduction to Gooch’s book, Fisher wrote that the author “has enabled us to realize by how narrow a margin of public confidence the Republic [of Germany] survives, and how easy it would be for the Allies, should they fail in a due measure of consideration for the real difficulties in which Germany is placed, so to swell the forces of monarchical and nationalist sentiment as to sweep away the Weimar Constitution and all that has been erected on its foundations. Were such a situation to be created the future of Central Europe would be dark indeed” (vii). Those portentous words were dated March 1925.

²³ Soffer, *History, Historians, and Conservatism in Britain and America: The Great War to Thatcher and Reagan*, 20.

²⁴ Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity*, 7.

Western society has been left out and almost forgotten, since from its nature it has no place in the organized scheme of specialized disciplines.²⁵

Dawson proposed a *cultural* religious history as a bridge over the chasm between “scientific history” and “ecclesiastical history.”

What was this “ecclesiastical history”? Like political history during the nineteenth century, European ecclesiastical history developed in response to the opening of archives and the study of documents. In England, the great figures of nineteenth-century ecclesiastical history were members of the Church of England, such as William Stubbs (1825-1901), bishop of Oxford. His *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Covering the History of the Anglo-Saxon Church* (1878) provided a foundation for William Bright (1824-1901), regius professor of ecclesiastical history at Oxford, in his *Chapters of Early English Church History* (1878), which was concerned with the conversion of England to the Christian faith and great figures in that development such as St. Columba and St. Aidan. Among Catholics, early contributions came from clerics: John Lingard (1771-1851), a priest, published his *Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church* in 1806; Francis Gasquet (1846-1929), cardinal and prior of the Downside Benedictine community, published his two-volume *Henry VIII and the English Monasteries* in 1888-1889; Philip Hughes, a priest, published vol. 1 of his *History of the Church* in 1934; and David Mathew (1902-1975), bishop auxiliary of Westminster during the Second World War, published his *Catholicism in England 1535-1935, Portrait of a Minority: Its Culture and Tradition* in 1936. *Church history*, then, was just that: a history of an institution and its leaders—the religious version of political history.

If Dawson sought to broaden this ecclesiastical history by relating it to cultural studies, how did he do it? What did it mean for him to write religious history? Episode 1 will attempt to answer these questions through a comparative study of three other historians known for their Catholicism: the laymen Lord Acton and Hilaire Belloc, and the monk David Knowles. What were the characteristics of the “religious history” written by these men? How did they differ from Dawson’s attempts?

John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton (1834-1902) was not a twentieth-century historian. However, his influence extended widely to interwar historians such as G. P. Gooch and G. M. Trevelyan, and his work was representative of important tendencies

²⁵ Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (1950; New York: Doubleday/Image Books, 1991), 12-13.

of historical thought in the twentieth century. He was born in Naples but raised in England as the descendent of the Roman Catholic branch of the old Acton family of Shropshire. After the early death of his father, Acton's mother married Granville George Leveson-Gower (1815-1891), Lord Leveson, later second Earl Granville, the liberal politician. Speaking several languages, Acton studied in Paris, in Edinburgh, and finally in Munich for six years under Professor Ignaz von Döllinger (1799-1890). Döllinger was the foremost Roman Catholic church historian in Germany, a major figure in the scientific school of historians of whom Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) was the leading figure. Döllinger trained Acton as a scientific and critical historian, introduced him to the liberal Catholic movement of the continent,²⁶ and educated him in Burkean liberalism and hatred of absolutism and love of truth. On his return to England in 1857 Acton settled at Aldenham (near London) where he built a great library. He dabbled in English liberal politics and inaugurated an intimate friendship with William Gladstone (who served as Prime Minister four times between 1868 and 1894).

One of Acton's ambitions on his return to England was to develop an active intellectual life among English Catholics. In 1858 he acquired the principal share in the proprietorship of *The Rambler*, a monthly founded in 1848 by Oxford convert John Moore Capes (1812-1889). Acton wrote regularly for this periodical, trying to influence Catholic political opinion (one of his first contributions was a review of a biography of Edmund Burke).²⁷ He became associated with John Henry Newman (1801-1890), showed great interest in founding a university for Catholics, and drew up plans for a Catholic historical society named after John Lingard.²⁸ Acton eventually took over *The Rambler* and made it into the main mouthpiece for liberal Catholicism (supporting freedom of scholarship). Acton conflicted with the ultramontaniam of Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman (1802-1865), Cardinal Henry Manning (1808-1892), and the theologian and philosopher W. G. Ward (1812-1882). In part to avoid censure, the journal was transformed into *The Home and Foreign Review* in 1862 and became one of the great reviews of the age, known for its

²⁶ Acton would involve himself in this movement in England—see Josef L. Altholz, *The Liberal Catholic Movement in England: The "Rambler" and its Contributors 1848-1864* (London: Burns & Oates, 1960).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁸ Herbert Butterfield, *Lord Acton* (London: G. Philip & Son, 1948), 4.

European rather than insular outlook. Due to clerical pressure, however, the *Review* was closed down in 1864, ending the liberal Catholic movement in England.

The major events in Acton's later life included his marriage to his cousin in 1865, a tour of various archives on the continent between 1864 and 1868, the Vatican Council of 1870 (Acton strongly opposed the definition of papal infallibility), his participation in the founding of the *English Historical Review* in 1886, his nomination as regius professor of modern history at Cambridge in 1895, and his planning *The Cambridge Modern History*. Acton died in 1902 after receiving the sacraments of his church. Because he would not write until he saw all the sources, and because of various personal pressures and sense of isolation, Acton never produced a book. He is known rather for his published articles, scattered lectures, vast erudition, and posthumous collections such as *Lectures on Modern History* (1906) and *The History of Freedom and other Essays* (1907).

What kind of historian of religion was Acton? How did his personal religion and beliefs affect his historiography? He published a Catholic journal, worshipped as a Catholic, married a Catholic, and wanted his children to be educated as Catholics. He practiced his faith until the end of his life. But he also took an unfavorable view of the exercise of church authority in the past. This view was only exacerbated when in the course of his archival tours he became aware of the efforts of other Roman Catholic historians to further the interests of their church. With wit, dry humor, and immense learning, he sought to expose the truth of the past about the corruption of power, so that Catholic people would not commit the sin of persecution again—as in his article “The Massacre of St. Bartholomew” (1869).²⁹ He thought that dedication to the truth could never be ultimately detrimental to the church. Although Acton was not primarily an ecclesiastical historian, he did write about the high politics of church and state (as in his 1869 article) as well as reviews of ecclesiastical history such as Mandell Creighton's *History of the Papacy during the Period of the Reformation* (two volumes published in 1887).³⁰

Acton always called himself a Catholic, but after the Vatican Council he strongly opposed the definition of papal infallibility. After around 1880 his relationship with Newman completely collapsed due to divergent perspectives on the papacy; his mind

²⁹ Lord Acton, “The Massacre of St. Bartholomew,” in *Essays in the Study and Writing of History*, ed. J. Rufus Fears, *Selected Writings of Lord Acton* (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1986).

³⁰ ———, “Review of Cheighton's *History of the Papacy*,” in *Essays in the Study and Writing of History*, ed. J. Rufus Fears, *Selected Writings of Lord Acton* (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1986).

asserted independence against his teacher and historical guide, Döllinger; his relationship with his wife changed for the worse after the illness of two daughters; and Acton began to hold ideas that sat loosely with Catholic tradition (such as hatred of the hierarchy, loss of faith in authority, and preoccupation with moral truth to the neglect of doctrinal truth). He was alone. Owen Chadwick remarks that the Acton of the 1860s could not have impacted the British mind like the Acton of the 1880s and 1890s. In these later decades, “His attitude to religion...rested far more on ethical than on dogmatic consideration.” Acton’s great impact “despite the total absence of any published work which changed anyone’s historical view about any particular event” was in good part due to his view on the vocation of the historian to mix historical apprehension with ethical axioms.³¹

Acton’s growing focus on ethics, combining with his liberal commitment to liberty, became his imaginative vision and fundamental belief-system through which he interpreted the past and ordered his vast erudition. This meant that if the early Acton had primarily seen Providence in history as shown by the continual “extraction of good from evil,” the later Acton (while maintaining his moral concerns) increasingly saw *progress toward liberty* as the manifestation of Providence in history.³² In his inaugural lecture as regis professor of modern history at Cambridge in 1895, Acton said: “And this constancy of progress, of progress in the direction of organised and assured freedom, is the characteristic fact of modern history, and its tribute to the theory of Providence.” Later in the lecture, he said that the law of continuous growth had transformed history from a “chronicle of casual occurrences into the likeness of something organic.”³³ “Organic” here meant something alive, with growth and purpose: a narrative of increasing human freedom.

In Chadwick’s opinion, Acton thought that “a person’s attitude to history and his philosophy of life and morality are not two different attitudes but are the same.”³⁴ Acton himself said that, “History is the true demonstration of Religion [i.e., his theory of Providential progress of freedom].”³⁵ In Acton, scientific History almost seemed to

³¹ Owen Chadwick, *Acton and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 65, 124, 126, 187, 189, 192-199, 202-203.

³² Butterfield, *Lord Acton*, 5, 10-11. Quotation on p. 5, though Butterfield did not give a source. The young Acton had in fact criticized writing history as the story of progress—see Lord Acton, “Review of Philp’s *History of Progress in Great Britain*,” in *Essays in the Study and Writing of History*, ed. J. Rufus Fears, *Selected Writings of Lord Acton* (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1986).

³³ Lord Acton, *A Lecture on the Study of History* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1895), 28, 56.

³⁴ Chadwick, *Acton and History*, 211.

³⁵ Acton, *A Lecture on the Study of History*, 32.

become the master discipline, and his idea of progress (the purification of ethical motives, the progress of knowledge³⁶) the interpretive framework of reality. But did not such an exalted view of history threaten to push the discipline beyond its limitations, beyond its place as a distinct discipline among others?

Hugh MacDougall offered an interpretation of Acton's transformation. "It would be a serious error to attribute Acton's loss of sympathy for virtually all of his Catholic contemporaries solely to his hatred of Ultramontanism. Of equal importance in explaining his isolation was the increased influence on his mind of the liberal thought of the day." He lost intellectual sympathy with Newman, who remained largely unmoved by the nineteenth-century cult of progress. Acton's "conversion was far more than a reaction against Ultramontanism. ...His thought became secularized and he sought a meaning for the world in terms of temporal history. Turning his back on his earlier position he became an apostle of progress." From history, Acton determined that its movement was toward liberty, and certain signs proved this: representative government, extinction of slavery, security of weaker groups, liberty of conscience. Acton put a very high value on politics to secure freedom of religion; thus, in his mind, Christians had a duty to adopt liberalism. Acton "did not appear to comprehend clearly how perilously close he himself had drifted toward the secularistic philosophies he deprecated. This apparent blindness was due in no small measure to his lack of interest in philosophy proper. 'With Acton history was irresistible,' noted Tyrrell; 'philosophy could be discounted.'"³⁷

Butterfield once wrote that, "The historian, like other specialists, easily imagines that his own pocket of thinking is the whole universe of thought...." He continued: "It would seem that the decline of religion gives undue power to history in the shaping of men's mind...and multitudes of young students have even come to the study of

³⁶ Lionel Kochan, *Acton on History* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat, 1954), 115, 119.

³⁷ Hugh A. MacDougall, *The Acton-Newman Relations: The Dilemma of Christian Liberalism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962), 167, 168, 169, 179. Tyrrell is quoted on p. 182 and MacDougall cited M. D. Petre, *George Tyrrell* (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), ii, 359. George Tyrrell (1861-1909) was a modernist Catholic writer. In contrast to Acton's close association of Christianity to the liberalism of his day, Dawson wrote (in 1935) that liberalism did not meet with unrestricted approval of religious men in nineteenth-century England (as in the opposition of the Oxford Movement and the social thinker F. D. Maurice). "I think we may conclude," Dawson wrote, "that there is no necessary connection between Christianity on the one hand and the parliamentary democracy and economic liberalism of the nineteenth century on the other. Undoubtedly a fusion between the two did take place in the later nineteenth century in England, the age of Gladstonian liberalism, but this was a local and temporary phenomenon.... Consequently there is no fundamental reason why the passing of parliamentary democracy and economic individualism should be opposed to Christian principles or sentiment." See Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935), 50-51.

technical history in the expectation that it would help them to shape their fundamental views about life. It is an expectation that is often disappointed.”³⁸ MacDougall commented that, “Acton’s inability to construct a unified intellectual framework for his life’s work in a large measure explains the frustrations and comparative sterility of his career. His *magnum opus*, a History of Liberty, could never be written until he had resolved the conflict between his Catholicism and his Liberalism on the one hand, and his Liberalism and History on the other.”³⁹ Acton’s problem was that of *metahistory*, as Dawson himself pointed out: “If you believe in the theory of progress, for instance, you will see history as the story of progress and you will tend to study that aspect of progress which seems to you the most important, as Lord Acton studied the history of the idea of freedom. And if you are a good historian, as Acton was, your preconceived metahistorical idea will not destroy the value of the historical research which has been motivated by it.”⁴⁰ Hayden White, writing two decades after Dawson, called that “preconceived metahistorical idea” a “precritically accepted paradigm of what a distinctively ‘historical’ explanation should be. This paradigm functions as the ‘metahistorical’ element in all historical works that are more comprehensive in scope than the monograph or archival report.”⁴¹

While proclaiming the ideal of impartiality but increasingly absorbing the theory of progress, Acton became a force not in the historiography of English Catholics, but in that of English Protestants. Ironically, Chadwick wrote:

“the more liberal, anti-Prussian side of South German Catholicism [given to Acton by Dollinger] helped to generate, not English Catholic history, not English church history, but a big school of British historians, especially those centred upon Cambridge, which flourished between 1902 and 1939. It consisted not only of Acton’s direct pupils—R. V. Laurence, J. N. Figgis, G. P. Gooch, J. H. Clapham, G. M. Trevelyan, H. C. Gutteridge. It reached out more widely, so that a younger historian like Herbert Butterfield needed to spend much of his life wrestling with Acton, his personality, his historical outlook, and his moral commitment.”⁴²

IF ACTON WROTE no book but was a great historian, Hilaire Belloc wrote many books and was not a great historian. Neither was great for a particular work of history, but

³⁸ Butterfield, *Man on His Past: The Study of the History of Historical Scholarship*, 18, 30-31.

³⁹ MacDougall, *The Acton-Newman Relations: The Dilemma of Christian Liberalism*, 184.

⁴⁰ Christopher Dawson, “The Problem of Metahistory,” in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1957; Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002), 304-305. This article was first published in *History Today* I (June 1951).

⁴¹ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), ix. White wrote an extensive article on Dawson: Hayden White, “Religion, Culture and Western Civilization in Christopher Dawson’s Idea of History,” *English Miscellany* IX (1958).

⁴² Chadwick, *Acton and History*, 186, 192. See: Butterfield, *Lord Acton*.

both were great for the same reason: the character of their historical minds, Acton for his erudition and Belloc for his historical imagination and sensitivity to historical perspective. If both men were personally devout, Acton worked as an empirical historian of church and state and Liberty while Belloc wrote as a Catholic controversialist historian who intentionally created his own version of “Catholic history.”

(Joseph) Hilaire Pierre René Belloc (1870-1953), poet and author, was born near Paris to a French barrister and his English wife who came from a wealthy family. Belloc’s mother Elizabeth met Manning in the 1860s and became a Catholic. Belloc grew up in genteel poverty and graduated with a first in modern history at Balliol College, Oxford, in 1895. The following year he married the Irish-American girl Elodie Hogan and together they had five children. Belloc was devastated when Elodie died in 1914 and when his eldest son was killed in the Great War.

Though gifted in historical study and a star-performer in the debates of the Oxford Union, Belloc was rejected for a prize fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford. This was a key event in his life, for he then had to turn to writing voluminously to make enough money to support his family. He began writing verse (*The Bad Child’s Book of Beasts*, 1896) and history (*Danton*, 1899). If Acton’s relationship to literature meant that he refused “to see style as an integral part of a written document,”⁴³ literature and history fruitfully embraced in Belloc’s imagination. A biographer noted that, “Certainly, historians have not been slow to point out the inaccuracy of much that Belloc wrote. But the best of his historical writing, such as *Marie Antoinette*, or his little book of imagined historical scenes, entitled *The Eye Witness*, or his *British Battles* series is illuminated by true *flair*, an acute power to feel himself into the past.” In his opinion, “Belloc is always best, whether in poetry, or in his essays, or in his historical writings, when he is *observing*.”⁴⁴ *The Path to Rome* (1902) secured Belloc’s literary reputation, and during the Edwardian era Belloc acquired a public-literary personality as a lover of beer and wine, songs, walking, and sailing.

If Belloc valued literature as an aid to the communication of history, he approached history through politics and biography. Belloc had practical experience of politics. In 1906 he became Liberal MP for South Salford. Disillusioned by parliamentary

⁴³ Seamus F. Deane, “Lord Acton and Edmund Burke,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* XXXIII (1972): 334.

⁴⁴ A. N. Wilson, *Hilaire Belloc* (1984; London: Gibson Square Books, 2003), 13, 222.

government, however, he left the House of Commons in 1910 and wrote a critique of modern society called *The Servile State* in 1912. The ideas in this book were later developed by the distributist movement⁴⁵ in the 1920s. Belloc's concern with politics carried over into his revisionist political histories of England. *The History of England* (1915) continued Lingard's series of volumes from 1689 to 1910. *A History of England* (1925-1931) covered early English history until 1612, and *A Shorter History of England*⁴⁶ (1934) attempted to cover the whole story through to the death of Queen Victoria.

Belloc's skills were more obvious in his biographies, however. Immediately in the first chapter of *Robespierre* (1901), "The Person and the Character of Robespierre," one is struck by Belloc's sense for the chance event, and the intrigue upon which hung the fate of a great man and thus of civilization, as Belloc would have put it. The Preface to the first edition revealed Belloc's séance-like approach to history: "Very often I have sat alone at evening before a fire of logs in a room near the Rue St. Honoré, and tried to call up for myself the great men who from that air challenged necessity, and, within the screen of their armies, created the modern world." Belloc continued:

In the attempt to fix exactly an historic figure, it is necessary first to make the physical environment reappear. In the great phrase of Michelet such history must be 'a resurrection,' and there is no resurrection without the resurrection of the flesh. In the second place, it is necessary to admit laborious and dusty discussion, not only of disputed events, but of the inner workings of a mind. It is the attempt to achieve either of these ends that gives such history as that which I have attempted its burden of endeavour. It is the attempt to unite the two which lends also to such a book a necessary, but inartistic incongruity.⁴⁷

Belloc developed his idea of history as the "resurrection of the flesh" in an interesting article called "On a Method of Writing History" published in *The Dublin Review* (1911). In his historical method, Belloc brought into a portrait of a person or an event of the past the numerous living details such as time of day, landscape, weather, bodily movement (walking, running), physical location in relation to buildings or other people, timing of events, physical appearance and moods, geographical location, etc. This was important because "*when you have presented the mere physical picture so vividly and so truly, a great number of false judgements, a whole series of moral actions in the men concerned, which bias might presuppose, are*

⁴⁵ This was a third-way economic philosophy formulated by such Catholic thinkers as Belloc and G. K. Chesterton to apply the principles of Catholic social teaching.

⁴⁶ For a summary of and contemporary response to this work by a Catholic, non-historian, see Christopher Hollis, "Mr. Belloc's Interpretation of English History," *Dublin Review* CXCVII (1935).

⁴⁷ Hilaire Belloc, *Robespierre: A Study* (1901; London: Nisbet, 1927), xiii, xv-xvi.

seen to be impossible. You have seen the men at work." Why did Belloc emphasize the physical? Because the method of history "which depends upon the gathering of a great number of physical and objective impressions, frames and limits the subjective part of history in such a manner as to subject the relation of motive and of human actions to much the same standard as they receive from our daily sight and hearing and touch of contemporary things."⁴⁸ Belloc sought to make the past living, to approach it from a broad engagement with life in the present, and to show that the facts of history were not just present in archives, but that they were also present in human people and their environment.

What kind of Catholic historian was Belloc? While his history focused on politics and political characters, whether in church or state, a Catholic historian, he thought (unlike Acton), was sensitive to a particularly "Catholic perspective" on history.

His religious history flowed out of the kind of religion he valued. In the year of Belloc's birth, the Franco-Prussian war broke out and Pope Pius IX (reigned 1846-1878) declared the doctrine of papal infallibility. Both events greatly shaped Belloc's life, first by forcing his family to flee France and instilling in Belloc a dislike of Germany, and by encouraging Belloc in ultramontane views on theology and church politics.⁴⁹ For Belloc, the claim to infallible authority was a distinct attribute of Catholicism that persuaded him of its uniqueness. If secularists were to argue that each religion is false because "each differs from the rest; and all are false, for all are compact of the same stuff as the others: a stuff bearing plainly the marks of human emotion and human construction," Belloc answered that there is, and has been, a religious institution unique and comparable to nothing else called the Catholic Church; no other religion makes a "secure, unfailing and constant affirmation of Infallible Authority."⁵⁰ The authority of the institutional Church was important to him, though he disagreed with the position of neutrality taken by Pope Benedict XV (reigned 1914-1922) during the Great War. Belloc's faith seemed to have much of the intellect and the will in it, and little of the emotions (for example, see his criticisms of Blaise Pascal's "emotional" faith in *Characters of the Reformation*⁵¹). In the opinion of his biographer, he did not possess what is thought of today as "personal religion";

⁴⁸ ———, "On a Method of Writing History," *Dublin Review* CXLIX (1911): 143, 152. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁹ Wilson, *Hilaire Belloc*, 3, 20.

⁵⁰ Hilaire Belloc, *The Catholic Church and History* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1926), 98, 100, 103.

⁵¹ ———, *Characters of the Reformation* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1936), 303-312.

he could not understand the “union with God” idea in the mystics like St. John of the Cross and St. Theresa, though he was moved by personal holiness and Benediction.⁵²

Belloc’s strong sense of religion as object, as institution, as church, meant that his religious history focused on great political and ecclesiastical churchmen of the past, as in *Richelieu* (1929). However, he also fought for a particular historiographical perspective, challenging the prevailing Protestant and Whig interpretations of history.⁵³ Though Belloc viewed the French Revolution with enthusiasm and—especially as a young man—appreciated writers outside his own faith like Carlyle and Froude,⁵⁴ he could be both anti-modern and triumphalist in his interpretations. Famously, in 1920 Belloc wrote *Europe and the Faith*. He did not see Catholicism as an “aspect” of European history. “This talk of ‘aspects’ is modern and therefore part of a decline: it is false, and therefore ephemeral: I will not stoop to it.” There is “no such thing as a Catholic ‘aspect’ of European history. There is a Protestant aspect, a Jewish aspect, a Mohammedan aspect, a Japanese aspect, and so forth. The Catholic sees Europe from within. There is no more a Catholic ‘aspect’ of European history than there is a man’s ‘aspect’ of himself.” Belloc meant that the Catholic Church had given Europe a particular identity other than racial or geographic. This is what he meant by the thesis of the book—that “The Faith is Europe and Europe is the Faith”—not that only Europeans could be Catholics.⁵⁵

Belloc was happy to point out not only what he perceived as falsifications in Protestant historiography, but in secular historiography as well. He thought that some distortions to history could work to undermine Catholicism. The historian Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) published *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in 1776-1788. Belloc wrote an article on Gibbon for *The Dublin Review* in 1916. He praised Gibbon’s writing but wrote that Gibbon purposefully attacked the Catholic Church. His “opposition to the Faith had the effect of distorting all the values of his narrative. It need not have done so—but it did so.” According to Belloc, Gibbon did not “weigh” his opponent accurately in regard to the actual historical significance that the

⁵² Wilson, *Hilaire Belloc*, 257, 258, 259.

⁵³ John P. McCarthy, “Hilaire Belloc and Catholic History,” *Thought* LXVII (1992): 62, 68.

⁵⁴ Owen Dudley Edwards, “Carlyle and Catholicism, Part I: Hilaire Belloc and *The French Revolution*,” *Carlyle Studies Annual* XXIII (2007): 79, 96.

⁵⁵ Hilaire Belloc, *Europe and the Faith* (London: Constable, 1920), 3, 5; McCarthy, “Hilaire Belloc and Catholic History,” 65.

Church had for the formation of Europe.⁵⁶ Belloc would likely have agreed with the diagnosis of the American philosopher Russell Hittinger:

Consigning Christianity and its institutions to the so-called “Dark Ages”—to a time of decadent classicism and cultural barbarity—Gibbon, by means both of omission and demotion of the material facts, called into question the cultural contributions of the Christian religion. In 1776, shortly before his death, David Hume congratulated Gibbon, for he saw the peculiar subtlety and force of Gibbon’s critique. Without having to address the theological understanding of what constitutes the meaning of Christianity, and without having to engage in interminable debates over the cosmological implications of miracles (which, thanks in large part to Hume, had transfixed the attention of philosophers and theologians at the time), Gibbon had accomplished in more subtle fashion the apologetical goal simply by rendering Christianity a relatively minor, though unfortunate, chapter in the history and development of Western culture.⁵⁷

Hittinger wrote elsewhere that during and after the Enlightenment, “modern debate over religion...shifted from natural theology to historical claims and ideologies, and...with the secularization of Christianity history tends to replace metaphysics as the central paradigm.” Furthermore, most people “care little for metaphysical debate, but they are willing to entertain a new story.” The subversive story “consists in [an] invitation to take a novel view of history; and...it does not so much ask for a consent to carefully worked-out philosophical premises, but calls for a conversion of perspective.”⁵⁸

Belloc understood the power of “subversive stories” and worked to counteract them. The “anti-Catholic bias of history is a matter curiously missed by most modern Catholics,” he wrote.⁵⁹ So he fought to set the record straight, especially in the cases of H. G. Wells⁶⁰ and J. B. Bury. When Bury’s *History of Freedom of Thought* (1913) was published, Belloc wrote an intelligent critique of it for *The Dublin Review*. He began by praising Bury’s *Life of St. Patrick* (1905) as an example of balanced and humane historical reasoning. But the exalted position of a regius professor as a model of historical writing only made the errors of Bury’s latest book more serious, Belloc thought. For him, *History of Freedom* would ingrain in readers a perspective diametrically opposed to that of the Catholic. The history of the freedom of thought was “presented as one in which the mind enjoyed during the early period of doubt

⁵⁶ Hilaire Belloc, “A Page of Gibbon,” *Dublin Review* CLIX (1916): 362, 363.

⁵⁷ Russell Hittinger, “The Metahistorical Vision of Christopher Dawson,” in *The Dynamic Character of Christian Culture*, ed. Peter J. Cataldo (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 7-8.

⁵⁸ ———, “The Two Cities and the Modern World: A Dawsonian Assessment,” *Modern Age* XXVIII (1984): 193-194. Dawson was himself very aware of the power of historical narratives to shape fundamental views of reality; see chapter V “Communism and the Christian Interpretation of History” in Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*.

⁵⁹ Hilaire Belloc, “The Entry into the Dark Ages,” review of *The Cambridge Mediaeval History*, Vol. I, *Dublin Review* CLI (1912): 359.

⁶⁰ See p. 117, fn 75.

[classical age] certain privileges of inestimable value, lost them for centuries through the evil blight of Catholicism, has slowly recovered them again as the Church slowly died, and will soon in her complete destruction enjoy them fully.”⁶¹

Indeed, one *can* write an historical attack on the Church and have it be good history, Belloc admitted. But using history to make a philosophical point, as Belloc thought Bury had done, could easily make for poor history. “The character which is not obtainable by man is an historically certain philosophy,” Belloc wrote. “We cannot, merely as historians, solve the problem of the universe and be certain that the religion or philosophy which we take for granted in our work is the true one. That is a matter not of human science but of Faith.”⁶² If the general outline of history is wrong, if people make an “original and general error” at the beginning of their thinking about history, no amount of detailed historical knowledge piled into such a scheme can possibly fix that original error.⁶³ In this way Belloc seemed to differ greatly from Acton because he recognized a clear difference between *historical* thinking and *philosophical* or *theological* thinking.

Historical thinking demanded three kinds of accuracy: (1) concerning the general atmosphere of an event (Belloc’s “resurrection of the flesh” idea), (2) concerning statements of motive and direction in action: accuracy in the relation of one statement to those around it (i.e., context and spirit of a text or person), and (3) concerning statements of dates, wording of documents, etc. Belloc admitted that “no one writing history to-day” had been guiltier than himself of trespassing against the third principle. However, the first two types of accuracy were far more important. “Accuracy in general atmosphere and accuracy in relation of one statement to another can only be judged by a man already possessed of a full knowledge of the subject; whereas accuracy in positive detail such as dates can be settled by reference to a few admitted authorities, or in the last resort to documents, and the statements are of their nature things which any man can judge for himself.”⁶⁴

Thus, Belloc distinguished between “positive” or empirical facts, and the question of interpretation or presentation of those facts in their proper proportion. He did this, characteristically, in his critique of Bury’s *History of Freedom*:

⁶¹ Hilaire Belloc, “Professor Bury’s *History of Freedom of Thought*,” *Dublin Review* CLIV (1914): 150-151, 155.

⁶² *Ibid.*: 156.

⁶³ Belloc, “The Entry into the Dark Ages,” 367.

⁶⁴ ———, “Professor Bury’s *History of Freedom of Thought*,” 156-158.

The vast efforts culminating in a great war against the Albigensians had, it may be presumed, some adequate historical cause. On page 56 [of Bury's book] we are told what this cause was: that 'the Church got far too little money out of this anticlerical population.' That again is bad history. That the loss of revenue excited a strong material interest in true enough, but to put it forward as the cause of the Albigensian War is childishly erroneous. It is as though some future historian, disliking the Manchester School of Economics, were to describe its intellectual triumph in the middle of the nineteenth century in England by saying that John Stuart Mill and Cobden, as well as Bright and Peel, were cunningly calculating the profit they could extort from the labouring poor.⁶⁵

Belloc was concerned with the book's "religious origin and effects," in other words, with the "web of beliefs" which shaped Bury's interpretations. Facts or literal statements could be "true," but they could also convey the exact opposite of historical truth depending on the aim or tone of the narrative that embeds those facts or statements.⁶⁶ The real task of the historian was to strive for accuracy in the three areas outlined above and to write a properly proportioned narrative. "This does not mean that a man cannot write history unless he is a Catholic," Belloc wrote, "but it does mean that he cannot write the history of Europe unless he knows what the Faith is, and puts it where it should be, at the centre of our system."⁶⁷

Belloc's often aggressive stance made him aware of the importance of historiography and of the underlying assumptions behind it because he did not accept the empirical ideal of "objectivity" as Acton had. This sensitivity, combined with his focus on the Catholic Church in European history and outstanding religious figures of the past characterized his religious history.

MICHAEL CLIVE KNOWLES (religious name David) (1896-1976), Benedictine monk and historian of monasticism and mysticism, was born in Warwickshire and raised in a Catholic family. If Belloc was a very active layman, a controversialist, and an author of political history, Knowles was a contemplative and scholarly monk, hostile to controversy, and an author of ecclesiastical history in its widest sense. As a boy Knowles enjoyed a close relationship with his father (a partner in a manufacturing firm), reading and thinking and traveling together. He attended school at Downside and made solemn vows there as a Benedictine monk in 1918. From 1919-1922 he attended Christ's College, Cambridge, in the classical tripos. In 1933, due to personal tension with the way of living monastic life at Downside, Knowles moved to Ealing

⁶⁵ Ibid.: 164-5.

⁶⁶ Ibid.: 160, 167. On the concept of "web of beliefs," see Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 165, 191, 213.

⁶⁷ Belloc, "The Entry into the Dark Ages," 359, 361.

Priory (in London) where he worked intensely on *The Monastic Order in England* (1940), which immediately established his reputation as a medieval historian. He continued living in London working on sequels to this book during the war and was gradually drawn into the professional world of history. In 1944 he became the first priest-monk to hold a college fellowship at Cambridge since the days of King James II & VII (reigned 1685-1688). In 1947 he succeeded his friend Z. N. Brooke (1883-1946) as professor of medieval history at Cambridge, and from 1954 to 1963 he held there the regius chair of modern history. Knowles was a fellow of the Royal Historical Society and its president 1956-1960. He became a fellow of the British Academy in 1947 and published his great three volume work *The Religious Orders in England* from 1948 to 1959.

Knowles admitted that he was an amateur historian without academic training in research or paleography. He came to history with a background in the classics and literature. *The American Civil War*, which he published in 1926, was an essay in historical literature, not a profoundly researched study. However, he possessed skills in ancient and modern languages, and an interest in medieval philosophy, which served him well as he began serious work for his *Monastic Order* at the age of thirty-three. While Knowles may not have possessed an original mind, he was greatly gifted at transmuting the work of others.⁶⁸ His literary temper of mind, combined with a dedication to truth and criticism,⁶⁹ made his later works of scholarship into marvelous narratives with real sympathetic fairmindedness.⁷⁰

Besides literature and language, Knowles brought experience of monasticism to his work, and a deep awareness of the mystical or inner aspect of religion.⁷¹ Belloc had generally treated religion objectively, politically. Knowles, however, wove together ecclesiastical history (monasticism as an institution) with spiritual history, the outer

⁶⁸ Alberic Stacpoole, "The Making of a Monastic Historian—II," *Ampleforth Journal* LXXX, no. 2 (1975): 37-38.

⁶⁹ "...The first virtue in an historian is a love of truth. ...To attain truth he must practice truth. No technique or learning can be a substitute for the firm care that never makes a statement which is not supported by evidence or by an authority which has itself been tested. The first and the last care in a writer of history, even at undergraduate level, is the care taken, even when the mind is exhausted, to check every reference, to search for the book or document that is known to exist and that may contain a vital fact, and to change every expression of judgement, every adjective, that is not certainly warranted." See David Knowles, "Academic History," *History* XLVII (1962): 232.

⁷⁰ Though some thought Knowles too much the perfectionist and out of sympathy with the rank-and-file medieval monk; see W. A. Pantin, review of *The Monastic Order in England*, *Journal of Theological Studies* XLII (1941): 222; Stacpoole, "The Making of a Monastic Historian—II," 37-38.

⁷¹ David Knowles, *The English Mystics* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1927); David Knowles, *What is Mysticism?* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1967).

with the inner. The first chapter of *The Religious Orders in England* began: “The epoch of history which opens with the pontificate of Innocent III presents to the student of *ecclesiastical institutions* and of *religious sentiment* an appearance very different from that which had gone before.”⁷² Attention to Religious sentiments, the inner aspect of religion as a spiritual force, shaped Knowles’s account of the rise of new religious orders: “While Innocent III and the more earnest members of the Curia were elaborating measures of reform and preparing for a general council which would knit together and invigorate the languid members of the Church, two spiritual agencies of another kind, but of incalculable power, whose birth could by no clairvoyance have been foreseen and whose unfolding followed no ascertainable law, were coming to maturity, the one in Languedoc [the Dominicans], the other in the heart of Italy [the Franciscans].”⁷³ Knowles was clearly moving toward a broader conception of religious history than was seen in Acton or Belloc.

Knowles was not at all a controversialist. William Pantin, reviewer of *The Monastic Order*, wrote in a personal letter to Alberic Stacpoole (sometime monk of Ampleforth Abbey) that Knowles “had a great gift for turning controversy into something positive and creative. English monastic history had become a very dreary controversy—Gasquet v. Coulton—for thirty or forty years, until MDK [Knowles] arrived on the scene; and he made the controversy just irrelevant, simply by doing the whole thing *de novo* so much better, so sympathetically and so candidly and so objectively; rather like Mabillon creating the science of diplomatic in answer to Papebroek or monastic studies in answer to de Rancé.”⁷⁴ Knowles himself wrote that having “arrived most unexpectedly in a chair, and being a Catholic priest, it was right to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, not with apologetics but with history in which Christianity was taken for granted as true. ...I have felt all my life—and it was corroborated by no

⁷² David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 3 (emphasis added).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁷⁴ Pantin to Stacpoole, 12 April 1969, qtd. in Stacpoole, “The Making of a Monastic Historian—II,” 37. On the Gasquet vrs. Coulton controversy, see David Knowles, “Cardinal Gasquet as an Historian,” in *The Historian and Character and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963). Jean Mabillon (1632-1707) was a French Benedictine monk and scholar whose *De Re Diplomatica* (1681) is considered the foundation of palaeography and diplomatics (the study of documents). Daniel von Papebroek (1628-1714), a Jesuit hagiographer, inspired Mabillon’s 1681 work. Armand Jean le Bouthillier de Rancé (1626-1700), abbot of La Trappe, criticized Mabillon for devoting his life to study rather than manual labor.

less a person than Pius XI—that scholarship is a real apostolate.”⁷⁵ A leading medievalist, A. Hamilton Thompson, reviewing *The Monastic Order in England* with praise, said that Knowles “writes with all the understanding and sympathy to be expected from one who has found in that life his vocation, and at the same time with all the objective method of treatment to be demanded from the historian. The combination is ideal and the result has on that account a special value.”⁷⁶

Like Belloc, Knowles investigated history through individual human people of the past.⁷⁷ In his inaugural lecture as regius professor of modern history at Cambridge in 1954, “The Historian and Character,” Knowles remarked that with the proliferation of history into constitutional, economic, social, administrative, cultural, and imperial fields, historians had lost interest in the personalities and characters of individual men and women. Knowles sought to call historians back to *human* history. If the biographer focused on one person, the historian’s research “sweeps wider and deeper over a field of folk.” The historian of human character must be open to extremes of good and evil outside of his own experience, as well as present people as they really were in their personalities. “A life is not a bundle of acts; it is a stream or a landscape; it is the manifestation of a single mind and personality that may grow more deformed or more beautiful to the end.” One must account for change through time: “No one passes through time and its accidents and remains unchanged. ...No one remains the same in virtue or in love; not to go forward is to go back.”⁷⁸

The real significance of character, even more than natural characteristics or intellectual gifts, was goodness of will achieved by conscious and tenacious choice. This was the heart of the historian of character’s focus.⁷⁹ In his inaugural lecture for the same chair in 1895, Lord Acton had also spoken of morality: “I exhort you never to debase the moral currency or to lower the standard of rectitude, but to try others by the final maxim that governs your own lives, and to suffer no man and no cause to

⁷⁵ Letter of David Knowles to the unidentified JHCA, 14 April 1964, qtd. in Stacpoole, “The Making of a Monastic Historian—II,” 19. See Pope Pius XI’s encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), par. 19 (www.vatican.va, accessed 17 July 2009).

⁷⁶ A. Hamilton Thompson, review of *The Monastic Order in England* and *The Religious Houses of Medieval England*, *English Historical Review* LVI (1941): 647.

⁷⁷ As one example among many, see his treatment of St. Dunstan’s pivotal role in the revival of monasticism in England during the tenth century: David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England: A History of its Development from the Times of St Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council, 943-1216* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 36-37.

⁷⁸ ———, *The Historian and Character and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 1, 2, 7, 10.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

escape the undying penalty which history has the power to inflict on wrong.”⁸⁰ Was this, too, the goal of Knowles’s historian of character? Knowles specifically addressed the problem in 1954: “We must, I think, allow that Acton wished to give the historian a function that cannot be his. ...Whether his [the historian’s] judgement is right or wrong, even if the facts seem certain, a later historian may question or reverse his verdict.” Knowles stated his case even more strongly: “The whole concept of the historian as a judge in a trial is radically false.... The historian’s task is very different, he contemplates the whole of his world; he does not apportion guilt; he considers the quality of the whole man, seen, it may be, during the passage of many years.” The historian does not indict the people of the past, he contemplates them; “he has to see them as in truth they were and to present them as such to others, and a man, as a man, cannot be seen truly unless his moral worth, his loveliness, is seen.”⁸¹ Contemplation was related to love: “it is surely true that human understanding and sympathy and love have always been elements in the make-up of the greatest historians. Like love in its other manifestations, it has caused many an error and many a tragedy [in historical work], but it is also at the heart of the greatest achievement.”⁸²

Knowles’s “contemplation” of human characters and moral goodness hinted at a profound connection between his Catholicism and his history, a monastic connection that affected his whole life and devotion to scholarship. The high ideals of a deepened spiritual life gave Knowles the impetus to turn away from distractions of the world toward silent pursuit of profound ecclesiastical scholarship.⁸³ In his historiography, religion was understood as not only objective and institutional but also as inner and even mystical, for otherwise the motivation and unpredictability present in certain human lives and movements of history were not intelligible. At his retirement Knowles wrote: “Monastic experience, a classical education and a deep love of architecture and literature—and an interest in some topics, such as medieval philosophy and Catholic spirituality, which are not normally possessed by English historians—have helped to prevent me from being too narrow and too dull. And

⁸⁰ Acton, *A Lecture on the Study of History*, 63.

⁸¹ Knowles, *The Historian and Character and Other Essays*, 13, 14.

⁸² ———, “Academic History,” 231.

⁸³ Stacpoole, “The Making of a Monastic Historian—II,” 21-23.

Catholic principles (not the same as ‘Catholic mentality’) help one to understand a great deal of historical material.”⁸⁴

IN 1971 KNOWLES collaborated with E. I. Watkin, J. J. Mulloy, and Christina Scott to write an appreciation of Christopher Dawson for publication in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*.⁸⁵ Unlike Acton, Belloc, and Knowles, Dawson did not grow up in a Catholic family. He inherited on both sides the tradition of the Anglican country gentleman that he wrote of in his essay “The World Crisis and the English Tradition.”⁸⁶ Dawson’s father was an ex-military man and his mother came from a family of notable ecclesiastics.⁸⁷ Her father was a Welsh church historian and she herself devoted time to laborious genealogical research. Dawson was raised in a devout Anglican religious culture for which he never lost his love.

Dawson studied history in Trinity College, Oxford, from 1908 to 1911. By the 1870s the history curriculum had taken the form that it maintained into the twentieth century when Dawson was at Oxford. This curriculum was very different from—for example—the one that formed Lucien Febvre (beginning in 1897) and Marc Bloch (beginning in 1904) in France at the dynamic *École Normale Supérieure*, where Fustel de Coulanges (1830-1889), the historian and teacher of Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), had taught, as well as Vidal de la Blache (1845-1918), the founder of the French school of human geography, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939), the philosopher-anthropologist, and the linguist Antoine Meillet (1866-1936). This French scene fostered the interdisciplinary thinking which would flower in Febvre’s and Bloch’s *Annales* journal, beginning in 1929.⁸⁸ At Oxford, however, the history program focused on constitutional and political history, though with reading in political science

⁸⁴ Alberic Stacpoole, “The Making of a Monastic Historian—I,” *Ampleforth Journal* LXXX, no. 1 (1975): qtd. on pp. 88-89 (no source given).

⁸⁵ David Knowles, “Christopher Dawson,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* LVII (1971).

⁸⁶ Christopher Dawson, “The World Crisis and the English Tradition,” in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1956; Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002). Originally published in *The English Review* LVI (1933): 248-260.

⁸⁷ Archdeacon William Latham Bevan (1821-1908), Church of England clergyman and father of Dawson’s mother; and Edward Latham Bevan (1861-1934), Church in Wales clergyman and youngest son of William; Edward was the first bishop of the diocese of Swansea and Brecon, created in 1923.

⁸⁸ Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929-89* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 12-15; Carole Fink, *Marc Bloch: A Life in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 25.

and economy as well.⁸⁹ There was also a growing movement to incorporate more training in historical research into the program. This occurred amidst a general debate over the nature of the undergraduate history degree: should it be a liberal education, a general training of the mind? Or should the history curriculum be geared towards teaching research methods to undergraduates? At Oxford, Charles Firth (1857-1936) was strongly proposing the latter model. He wanted students to receive training in historical research methods that would enable them to eventually add to the general fund of historical knowledge. Firth only partially succeeded, however, in convincing the university to reform its curriculum because the old ideal of the university serving primarily as an institution of education (rather than research) held out, as it did at Cambridge as well. Thomas Tout (1855-1929), however, more fully converted the University of Manchester to the ideal of research.⁹⁰

Dawson reported later in life that he had gotten little out of his Oxford education. Christina Scott noted that he did learn valuable ideas and techniques of scholarship at Oxford, but that he had “little interest in the set history syllabus—Stubbs on Constitutional History, Oman on the Normans and the like. He therefore devoted his time to following his own course of reading and studies which were mainly in the field of the philosophy of history and religion.” This eclectic approach was encouraged by his strongly individualistic tutor, Ernest Barker (1874-1960).⁹¹ However, as the English universities taught political history and flirted with the German ideals of rigorous “scientific” training for original research, they lacked the rising French ideal of melding history and the social sciences. Hence, Dawson’s involvement with sociology by 1920 was through the Sociological Society, as detailed in chapter two, rather than through educational institutions. That contact helped form Dawson’s mature, interdisciplinary thinking about history and historical development in *Progress and Religion*. That book was published in the same year that the new *Annales* journal began publication in France (1929) under Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, announcing *la nouvelle histoire*. This new history sought to replace narrative with *histoire-problème* (problem oriented history), to examine the whole range of human activity in place of mainly political history, and—in order to achieve these

⁸⁹ Peter Slee, *Learning and a Liberal Education: The Study of Modern History in the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Manchester 1800-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 91-92, 103-104, 149, 163-164.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 135-53.

⁹¹ Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson, 1889-1970* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1984), 44-5.

aims—to collaborate with other disciplines such as geography, sociology, anthropology, and so on.⁹² From England Dawson shared these concerns for interdisciplinary, problem-oriented history.

As a young man at Oxford, Dawson's admiration for Edward Gibbon's work was only matched by his enthusiasm for Augustine's *City of God*. Drawing from both Christian and secular historiographical traditions would be a hallmark of his later work. While still a student and five years before conversion to Catholicism, Dawson traveled to Rome in 1909 with a party organized by the mother of his close friend Edward Watkin. Only two years before this visit, the centenary of the birth of Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882), the foremost military figure and popular hero of the age of Italian unification, had been celebrated widely in both England and Italy. This confirmed the important place Italy held in the imagination of English people, especially after the failed revolution of 1848 until the Great War.⁹³ With the romance of Italy very much in his own imagination on his 1909 vacation, Dawson sat on the steps of the Capitol near the church *Ara Coeli* in the same place where Gibbon had been inspired to write *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. He was impressed by the architecture of that church, which linked two worlds: pagan classical antiquity and Christianity. Sitting there, he first conceived the idea of writing a history of culture. (One also thinks of G. M. Trevelyan's 1897 visit to another hill in Rome, the Janiculum, a place which partly inspired his buoyant celebration of liberty and nationhood, *Garibaldi's Defence of the Roman Republic* of 1907.⁹⁴) In a journal entry later in that year, he referred to a "vow made at Easter in the Ara Coeli [in Rome]" and stated that he had since "had great light on the way it may be carried out. However unfit I may be I believe it is God's will I should attempt it."⁹⁵

The seeds of Dawson's lifework on the history of cultures was inspired by his youthful observations in Rome of the transformation of a particular culture by a religion. Acton and Belloc had both had experience in practical politics; they both

⁹² Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929-89*, 2.

⁹³ David Cannadine, *G. M. Trevelyan: A Life in History* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 66, 69.

⁹⁴ G. M. Trevelyan, "Autobiography of an Historian," in *An Autobiography and Other Essays* (London: Longmans, Green, 1949), 31. The book was written in 1906 and published in 1907, thus corresponding with the years of the greatest Liberal political victory in English politics for a generation. Trevelyan's books made quite a sensation in Liberal circles. Trevelyan went on to write *Garibaldi and the Thousand* (1909) and *Garibaldi and the Making of Italy* (1911), which appeared on the fiftieth anniversary of the final establishment of the Italian nation. See episode two of this chapter.

⁹⁵ Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson* (1984; New Brunswick: Transaction, 1992), qtd. on p. 49.

wrote the political history of institutions (church or state) or people (Belloc's biographies of Danton, Robespierre, etc.). Knowles wrote of an institution (monasticism) in its relation to ideas, spirituality, and national life—a broadened ecclesiastical history indeed. But Dawson drew from archeology, anthropology, sociology, and spirituality to chart a new, more interdisciplinary path which attempted to demonstrate the role of religion in history as a cultural *force*, not simply as an institution. Dawson was deeply influenced in his approach to religion by wide reading of Continental figures such as Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), Henri Bergson (1859-1941), Pierre Rousselot (1846-1924), Friedrich von Hügel (1852-1925), and Joseph Maréchal (1878-1944). His reading of these scholars gave him a view of religion from the perspective of sociology and philosophy, the outer and the inner. All of this made his work totally unique in the British Catholic community of the 1930s. Knowles did not publish a major historical work until 1940; Dawson was six years older than Knowles, and the Cambridge monk wrote in his obituary that “to those who were young, or not so old, in the late 1920s and the 1930s he [Dawson] will always remain as a master....”⁹⁶

Unlike Belloc the star Oxford debater, Dawson was not a controversialist. But *like* Belloc, he was concerned to correctly set out proper proportions in history. Just because modern Western people often defined their lives in terms of progress or technology or professional success apart from religion did not mean that all people in the contemporary or past world did the same. Therefore, Dawson sought to demonstrate the function of religion in world history in *Progress and Religion* (1929). Also, like Belloc, he was concerned that a false historical narrative which failed to understand the true role of Christianity in history had contributed to the secularization of the West.⁹⁷ Finding the correct proportion in history was a matter of learning to think historically: “it is impossible to understand the past unless we understand the things for which the men of the past cared most.”⁹⁸ One must attempt, he thought, to view the past through the eyes of those who lived there. Thus, in his introduction to *The Making of Europe* (1932), he wrote: “If I have written at length on these matters

⁹⁶ David Knowles, “Christopher Dawson,” *Tablet*, 6 June 1970, 558.

⁹⁷ Christopher Dawson, “The Christian View of History,” in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1956; Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002), 257. Originally published in *Blackfriars* XXXII (1951): 312-327

⁹⁸ Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity*, 7.

[religion], it is not to prove a theological point or to justify a religious point of view, but to explain the past.”⁹⁹

The second chapter of *The Making of Europe* began: “The influence of Christianity on the formation of the European unity is a striking example of the way in which the course of historical development is modified and determined by the intervention of new spiritual forces.”¹⁰⁰ He continued: “History is not to be explained as a closed order in which each stage is the inevitable and logical result of that which has gone before. There is in it always a mysterious and inexplicable element, due not only to the influence of chance or the initiative of the individual genius, but also to the creative power of spiritual forces.” In both of these quotations he used the phrase “spiritual forces.” He did not only mean Christianity by it. As the Roman Empire decayed, he wrote, this created a social and spiritual vacuum in which rushed many kinds of spiritual forces: “The mystery religions of Asia Minor spread westwards in the same way as Christianity itself, and the religion of Mithras accompanied the Roman armies to the Danube and the Rhine and the British frontier. The Egyptian worship of Isis and the Syrian cults of Adonis and Atargatis, Hadad of Baalbek, and the Sun-God of Emesa, followed the rising tide of Syrian trade and migration to the West, while in the oriental underworld new religions, like Manichaeism, were coming into existence....” The essential question was: how had Christianity survived in such an environment? “If Christianity had been merely one among the oriental sects and mystery religions of the Roman Empire it must inevitably have been drawn into this oriental syncretism. It survived because it possessed a system of ecclesiastical organization and a principle of social authority that distinguished it from all the other religious bodies of the age.” In this way *The Making of Europe* combined Dawson’s broad understanding of religion as spiritual and social force with religion as institution.¹⁰¹ This was the method of Dawson the “intellectual ascetic”: restrained treatment of religion, and the attempt to simply demonstrate the sociological function of religion in general and Christianity in particular during the first millennium, without Belloc’s proselytism.

What was the significance of the fact that Dawson attempted not to write “church history” but the “history of culture” and the history of “religious culture”? It did not

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 33, 37, 38.

mean that institutions were unimportant. Rather, Dawson sought for a common ground between secular and religious history, a place where both could meet. But for both to meet, both had to change. Ecclesiastical history had to stop being merely ecclesiastical. Ernst Troeltsch in his *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (1911) and Max Weber in his *Sociology of Religion* (1922) had already made this point, and Dawson had learned from them. Understanding the history of Christianity “involves a good deal more than the study of ecclesiastical history in the traditional sense,” Dawson wrote. “It involves the study of two different processes which act simultaneously on mankind in the course of time. On the one hand, there is the process of culture formation and change, which is the subject of anthropology, history and allied disciplines; and on the other there is the process of revelation and the action of divine grace which has created a spiritual society and a sacred history...studied only as a part of theology...”¹⁰² Ecclesiastical history had to come into relation to material sources outside itself in order to avoid exclusive identification with the history of religious institutions and their theologies. The sociological and cultural function of religion in general had to join with the specific history of Christianity and its institutions.¹⁰³ The best work in the field of “religious culture,” he thought at the end of his career, had not been done by ecclesiastical historians but by literary historians. “With all his faults Sainte-Beuve was a real religious historian when he wrote his *Port Royal*,” Dawson noted, “and in our own days I think that the best approach to religious history has been made from the literary side, in respect of Catholicism, by Bremond in his literary study of religious experience in France in the 17th century, and of Protestantism by Professors Perry Miller and Johnston in their study of the New England mind.”¹⁰⁴

Secular history had to change too, Dawson thought. By the post-Second World War era, it had. In 1958, five years after Belloc’s death, Knowles noted that in the field of medieval history, at least, controversialist history had died: “There exists no

¹⁰² Christopher Dawson, *The Formation of Christendom* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), 18.

¹⁰³ Hittinger, “The Metahistorical Vision of Christopher Dawson,” 8, 9.

¹⁰⁴ Christopher Dawson, *The Dividing of Christendom* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1965), 16. Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869) was a French literary critic and author of *Port Royal* (1837-1859) which studied the history of religious belief associated with Jansenism. Henri Bremond (1865-1933) was a French literary scholar and theological modernist who published his twelve-volume *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu’à nos jours* in 1916-1936. Perry Miller (1905-1963) was an American intellectual historian who wrote *The New England Mind* (1953). Thomas A Johnson (1919-1984), a scholar of Emily Dickinson, co-authored with Miller the book *The Puritans* (1938).

longer...any serious difference of interpretation, between Catholic and non-Catholics.” This new “general unanimity of treatment” was “a great achievement,” he thought.¹⁰⁵ In 1969 Fritz Wagner of the University of Munich noticed the same thing in the pages of *History and Theory*. “To summarize, under the impact of twentieth-century catastrophes and their consequences, the tasks to be done by secular history and by church history are converging.” What did Wagner mean by the “tasks to be done”? He wrote: “It is easy to collect evidence pointing to a growing impatience and dissatisfaction with traditional, and, in the classical sense, descriptive and objective, critical historiography. Let us begin in the area of secular history: there is a tendency to approach the question of meaning” because since the Great War attention to *meaning* and “ultimate things” had increased in the world of historical writing, thanks to metahistorians such as Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) and Arnold Toynbee and sociologists such as Pitirim Sorokin (1889-1968). The founding of the journal *History and Theory* (1960) confirmed the increasingly strong link between the two words of its title and the increasing attention to philosophical contemplation in relation to empirical facts. The era of the world wars brought a “heightened consciousness of a problematic existence”; political and “objective” history was failing to address the kinds of questions people were asking. The more that secular priority for a one-sided political history was removed, “the sooner the determining factors of religious life may find their way back into secular historiography,” Wagner predicted. “Faced with the difficult task of the elucidation of being, the interpretation of meaning, the existential diagnosis...historians, at least within our civilization, will find themselves more and more dependent upon one another.”¹⁰⁶

Even for Lord Acton, “objective” history was not enough. A mass of details and note cards was simple antiquarianism and chronicling unless there was an interpretive framework of meaning. That was why Acton interpreted the past in terms of the history and progress of freedom—this gave meaning to the matter. But after Acton and after the Great War, events began to crystallize more clearly the problem of meaning and the poverty of bald, “objective” facts: why did millions of men die in the trenches? Why did the Great War happen? How can we avoid another war? How can

¹⁰⁵ David Knowles, “The Need for Catholic Historical Scholarship,” *Dublin Review* CCXXXII (1958): 124, 125.

¹⁰⁶ Fritz Wagner, “Church History and Secular History as Reflected by Newton and His Time,” *History and Theory* VIII (1969): 98, 99, 100-101, 109. This article was translated from *Saeculum* XVII (1966): 193-204.

we avoid the destructive uses that scientific knowledge can be put to? Wagner, in the article quoted above, wrote: “the separated disciplines of church and secular history have a transcendental point of reference which is becoming noticeable again today, and which could be of great importance in their respective futures.”¹⁰⁷ This “transcendental point of reference” was the series of questions arising in *both* fields of history—secular and ecclesiastical. Common questions could point toward cooperation and even convergence of perspectives.

Christopher Dawson showed the way toward a religious and cultural history that attempted to coordinate political and ecclesiastical, secular and religious history in relation to each other. He did this by offering *culture*, and the history of culture, as a common “point of reference,” a locus of shared questions and hence of cooperation between distinct disciplines of knowledge. He worked toward this coordination of secular and religious history through a broadened concept of religion as both objective and subjective, institutional and cultural/spiritual force. He also did it by challenging historians to think outside the archive and to consider other possibilities than the *nation* as meaningful communities upon which to base historical research.

Episode 2: Nationalism and the Quest for a New Community

If the “quest for community” was a significant sociological need and political force in the twentieth century,¹⁰⁸ the structure of British historiography was not unaffected. Questions asked after the Great War about nationalism¹⁰⁹ and history led some historians to try to completely re-conceptualize their historiographical approaches.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.: 97.

¹⁰⁸ Robert A. Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (1953; New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), vii; Christopher Dawson, *Beyond Politics* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1939), chapter III.

¹⁰⁹ Nationalism is “primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.” See: Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1. The concept “nation” has been notoriously difficult to define. Benedict Anderson argues that nationality or nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. They emerged toward the end of the eighteenth century as the older sacral culture of Christendom declined, with its sacred language (Latin). Before that time, fundamental conceptions about “social groups” depicted them as “centripetal and hierarchical, rather than boundary-oriented and horizontal.” Religiously imagined communities gave way to politically imagined communities. For Anderson, then, the nation was “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” *Boundaries* (limitation) were always central to the concept of the nation (no one imagines a nation as coterminous with mankind). *National sovereignty* was important because, during the age of Enlightenment and Revolution the divinely-ordained, hierarchical and dynastic idea of the realm, was challenged. *Community* was important because the nation was imagined as a deep horizontal comradeship; a sense of fraternity then made it possible for some members to die for the nation. Anderson used the word “imagination” because no one ever met all the members of the national community and thus it primarily had to live in their minds. See: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; London: Verso, 1991), 6-7, 15, 16.

During the eighteenth century, the ideal in the West was universal history, as in *A Universal History: From the Earliest Account of Time to the Present* (1736-1765), initiated by Georg Sale. After 1800, however, during the age of European imperialism, the scope of historical vision contracted to view the rest of the world from the perspective of European domination. But even a European perspective was lacking as historical studies during the nineteenth century focused more and more on the nation-state. This movement was related to the opening of new national archives and the influence of nationalism. The cult of the nation in Germany, for example, developed around the time of the Wars of Liberation against the French conqueror Napoleon in 1813 and 1814, substituting the universal principles (e.g., equality) of the Enlightenment with the *nation* (an inclusive community rooted in the past) as the fundamental historical object.¹¹⁰ Western imperial contact with much of the globe, however, also exported and inspired nationalism which by the late nineteenth century was turned against the West itself as nations struggled underneath Western domination. In this way national historical writing had particular importance in such places as Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, India, and Japan.¹¹¹

With the collapse of the international economy during the Great War and the limited glorification of the principle of nationality in the Treaty of Versailles, the interwar period witnessed the apogee of nationalism.¹¹² Nevertheless, these years also saw the beginnings of the academic study of nationalism in figures such as the American Carleton J. H. Hayes (1882-1964),¹¹³ and the search for alternative models for historical study other than the nation-state.

This second episode of British historiography will briefly compare three interwar historians and their relation to national historical writing: G. M. Trevelyan, who continued in the interwar years this kind of historical writing; Eileen Power, who championed a new international economic and social history; and Christopher Dawson, who developed the new perspective of the history of culture after the Great

¹¹⁰ Georg G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2008), 8, 71.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, chaps. 2 and 5.

¹¹² E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3, 132, 133, 143.

¹¹³ See his *Essays on Nationalism* (1926). However, Stalin wrote on “the national question” in 1913; this was published together with later writings in Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1936) in a volume that had considerable international influence—see Hobsbawm p. 2. For an early study in Britain, see G. P. Gooch, *Nationalism* (London: Swarthmore, 1920).

War. Each of these historians represented a different kind of history in Britain between the world wars; each of them was well-known and all three wrote books that are still in print. The question at hand is: what kinds of communities did these historians see as meaningful historical subjects after the Great War? I will argue that for some scholars, the war raised questions about the nation-as-community, and so Eileen Power and Christopher Dawson looked for alternative communities upon which to base historical study.

In Britain during the nineteenth century, the main tradition of historical writing had long been the national one, best represented in its literary form by Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859) and in its scientific form by John Lingard and Frederic William Maitland (1850-1906). After the war, British historiography fragmented, though the national tradition continued in the work of George Macaulay Trevelyan (1876-1962).

Trevelyan, regius professor of modern history at Cambridge 1927-1940, was also a public educator, as when in 1948 he contributed to a BBC series in company with Bertrand Russell, Lord David Cecil, and Christopher Dawson on *The Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians*.¹¹⁴ He was born in Welcombe, near Stratford-on-Avon, the son of Sir George Otto Trevelyan (1838-1928), liberal MP and cabinet minister. He spent his youth in Northumberland where he learned to love nature and the countryside (he was a great walker, often traversing the Cheviot country on both sides of the border between Scotland and England). He became a devoted conservationist. From an early age he resolved to write history in a grand manner like his great-uncle Macaulay. He wanted to write history for the public, while basing his books on primary archival research as much as possible. Trevelyan was elected to the British Academy in 1925. Throughout his life he remained faithful to a secular version of Christian ethics: “a love of things good and a hatred of things evil.”¹¹⁵

Trevelyan was thirty-eight-years-old when the Great War began, so his thinking was already deeply formed around the liberal political traditions of his aristocratic family. He retained in the postwar world “an essentially Victorian conception of the

¹¹⁴ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 159.

¹¹⁵ Entry by David Cannadine, ODNB (accessed 13 April 2009); Trevelyan: “As a great poem, as an epic without beginning or end, I read History and never tire.” He continued: “But I can find in it no ‘philosophy of history.’ Philosophy must be brought to history, it cannot be extracted from it. And I have no philosophy of my own to bring, beyond a love of things good and a hatred of things evil.” See G. M. Trevelyan, “Stray Thoughts on History [1948],” in *An Autobiography and Other Essays*, by G. M. Trevelyan (1949; Freeport: Books for Libraries, 1971), 82.

intellectual as public—although not civil—servant.” His moral and political ideals were rooted in the lived ideals of the English nation.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, the war had a devastating effect on him. Trevelyan served with an ambulance unit on the Italian front from 1915 until the end of the war (as did Ernest Hemingway, in 1918). What did Trevelyan think about the war? “A great war necessarily has a profound effect on the policy and philosophy of the nation engaged in it,” Trevelyan noted.¹¹⁷ “It is curiously different,” he wrote to his mother in 1921, “living before the war and after it. The certainty of permanence has gone.”¹¹⁸ There was disillusion over the old creed of liberalism and progress. Never again would he write with the ardent optimism of his pre-war books on Garibaldi: *Garibaldi’s Defence of the Roman Republic* (1907), *Garibaldi and the Thousand* (1909), and *Garibaldi and the Making of Italy* (1911). The Liberal Party gave way to the Labour Party—a catastrophe in Trevelyan’s eyes.¹¹⁹

For Trevelyan, the old liberal internationalist ideals of the prewar world had disappeared. But against a background of new and powerful governments rising on the Continent after the Great War, his belief in English exceptionalism grew, so that after the war he focused more intensely on national historical writing and sought for a new identity as the “national historian.”¹²⁰ He did think that nationalistic history could potentially be dangerous: “If wrongly studied it [history] may end in filling the streets with blood, and the countryside with trenches and bursting shells. The war of 1870 was ascribed by some to the historical writings of Thiers, and the greater catastrophe of our own era to those of Treitschke. There was probably an element of truth in these charges. But, if rightly taught, the annals of mankind cultivate a more intelligent patriotism that respects the claims of others.”¹²¹

In this way, Trevelyan wrote a liberal national history, recognizably in the Whig tradition, that was not narrow, unfair, or nationalistic. His one-volume *History of*

¹¹⁶ Julia Stapleton, “Cultural Conservatism and the Public Intellectual in Britain, 1930-70,” *European Legacy* V (2000): 800.

¹¹⁷ G. M. Trevelyan, *The War and the European Revolution in Relation to History* (London: University of London Press, 1920), 27.

¹¹⁸ Cannadine, *G. M. Trevelyan: A Life in History*, 88. Cannadine cites a letter from Trevelyan to his mother, Lady Caroline Trevelyan, October 1921, in the Sir George Otto Trevelyan manuscripts.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 87, 88.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 75, 90, 109, 114, 120.

¹²¹ G. M. Trevelyan, “The Present Position of History,” in *Clio, A Muse, and other Essays* (London: Longmans, 1930), 178. Louis-Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877) was a French politician and historian who wrote the very popular, ten-volume *Histoire de la Revolution Française* in 1823-1827. Heinrich Gotthard von Treitschke (1834-1896) was a nationalist German historian and political writer whose great work was the five-volume *Deutsche Geschichte im 19. Jahrhundert*, published in 1879-1894.

England (1926), which he resolved to write during the Great War as a thank-offering to the English people, replaced J. R. Green's *Short History of the English People* (1874) as the definitive account of the English past for the interwar years. He was committed to surmounting the specialized research of his day in order to communicate a national, political history of parliamentary government and religious toleration to the public. His account stressed the unique British virtues of liberty, stability, and order—which seemed so little evident on the Continent at that time. Trevelyan's purpose was to awaken the historical imagination in the general reader.¹²² Historical imagination would draw people to the heroes of the past and to the national virtues. In his 1913 essay "Clio, A Muse" Trevelyan argued against J. B. Bury's characterization of history as a science of facts. To Trevelyan, history was only partly a matter of fact because facts were useless unless they produced a new state of mind in the reader. Rather, Trevelyan posited, the true historical tradition of England was not the imported German scientific conception of history, but the native literary tradition that had thrived since the day of his own great-uncle Macaulay.¹²³

Others responded to the war and the postwar years in an opposite way to that of Trevelyan. For them, the prevalence of national history encouraged nationalism and should be avoided. "What is fundamentally the matter with European politics to-day," wrote futuristic fiction writer H. G. Wells in 1921, "is that all the European boundaries are impossibly small for modern conditions."¹²⁴ Wells critiqued the system of European communities based on national boundaries as prohibitive of the common historical ideas needed to avoid another Great War. His best-selling *Outline of History* (1920) sought to address the need for common historical ideas through the study of world history. Education in world history, he thought, would prepare people to accept the fact that their true nationality is mankind and to work toward world government.¹²⁵ Reflecting back upon his lifework, Arnold Toynbee, author of *A Study of History* (1934-1961), wrote that, "In 1915 and 1916, about half the number of my

¹²² ———, "Clio, A Muse," in *Clio, A Muse, and other Essays* (London: Longmans, 1930), 152; Cannadine, *G. M. Trevelyan: A Life in History*, 126-127.

¹²³ Trevelyan, "Clio, A Muse," 145, 148, 152, 163, 169. This essay was first published in this form in 1913, somewhat altered from an article in the *Independent Review*, 1904. Bury's inaugural lecture as regius professor of modern history at Cambridge was called "The Science of History; see J. B. Bury, *An Inaugural Lecture, Delivered in the Divinity School Cambridge on January 26, 1903* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903).

¹²⁴ H. G. Wells, "An Apology for a World Utopia," in *The Evolution of World Peace*, ed. F. S. Marvin (London: Humphrey Milford, 1921), 168.

¹²⁵ ———, *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind* (London: George Newnes, 1920), 2, 750, 752.

school fellows were killed.... The longer I live, the greater grows my grief and indignation at the wicked cutting-short of all those lives. I do not want my grandchildren and great-grandchildren to have the same fate. The writing of this book [*A Study of History*] has been one of my responses to the challenge that has been presented to me by the senseless criminality of human affairs.”¹²⁶

The questions raised by the Great War about how history should be presented to the public greatly influenced Eileen Power and Christopher Dawson. Power (1889-1940), who shared with Trevelyan a talent for literary history, was among the first female writers and teachers of economic, social, and women’s history. She was born in Cheshire of Protestant background. Her father was a stockbroker who ended up in prison for fraud in 1891. Power studied at Girton College, Cambridge, from 1907-1910. She studied in France for a year, and then became director of historical studies at Girton College. She was awarded an Albert Kahn traveling fellowship in 1920-1921, and the time she spent in India and China sparked her interests in comparative and world history. In 1921 she was appointed lecturer in economic history at the London School of Economics, where she formed a close friendship with R. H. Tawney and remained until her death. With her sister Rhoda she gave the memorable BBC school history broadcasts in the 1920s and 1930s on international aspects of medieval and world history. She played a major role in the founding of the Economic History Society in 1926 and its journal *Economic History Review*. She supported the League of Nations and attended an assembly in 1939, but was also a critic of fascism and the appeasement policy. Books such as *Medieval English Nunneries* (1922), *Medieval People* (1924), and *Boys & Girls of History* (1926) proclaimed her emphasis on ordinary human lives.¹²⁷

Power, like Dawson, was twenty-nine-years-old when the Great War ended. The national experience of the war greatly affected her. In 1921 she contributed an essay called “The Teaching of History and World Peace” to a volume on *The Evolution of World Peace*. This essay revealed Power’s great concern for teachers and the teaching of history. The answer to the international problem, she thought, was knowledge of how to live in a community not based on class or nation. The problem was that history

¹²⁶ Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, rev. ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 11.

¹²⁷ Entry by Maxine L. Berg, ODNB (accessed 13 April 2009). Tawney’s marriage did not seem to fulfill him. The one woman he admired and possibly loved was the beautiful and clever Eileen Power, though the relationship was never more than that between colleagues. He was deeply affected by her death of a sudden heart attack in 1940. See entry on Tawney by Lawrence Goldman, ODNB (accessed 13 April 2009).

teaching focused too much on national history. For example, concerning the mid-seventeenth century, Power wrote, children were generally taught about the wars between the English and the Dutch. The Dutch were the enemy. However, at that time in history, “Dutch refugees develop our industries, Dutch models teach us banking, Dutch bulbs adorn our gardens, Dutch methods of cultivation gain ground in our fields, Dutch engineers drain our fens; ...in the end we are reduced to getting a king from them.” Do children know these things today?¹²⁸ Quoting H. G. Wells, she suggested that the success of the League of Nations depended on a public opinion grounded in common historical ideas. History teachers could foster such community by teaching world or at least European history; she even floated the idea of a national holiday called Humanity Day to celebrate great international scientific, religious, and artistic individuals.¹²⁹

Power’s deep interest in internationalism grew out of reflections on the Great War, Wells’s *Outline of History*, and her own world travels. She knew both Wells and Arnold Toynbee, and even wrote during the 1930s an “introduction to world history” herself, a book of twenty-eight chapters, though it was never published. She was deeply interested in Toynbee’s project of a universal history and they traveled together through Manchuria and northern China late in 1929.¹³⁰ Also during the 1930s Power cooperated in a great international project to plan the *Cambridge Economic History*, which was European in scope. Power “believed in using her position as a historian to counteract militarism and nationalism” with international social and economic history.¹³¹

As part of this international focus, she offered a brilliant reconceptualization of specifically European history in a book written with her sister: the 1927 volume *Cities and Their Stories: An Introduction to the Study of European History*. The book had

¹²⁸ Eileen Power, “The Teaching of History and World Peace,” in *The Evolution of World-Peace*, ed. F. S. Marvin (London: Humphrey Milford, 1921), 180, 181, 183.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 185, 186, 189, 190.

¹³⁰ Toynbee fell in love with her during that trip. Though married, when Toynbee heard of her engagement to the orientalist Reginald Johnston, after a sleepless night he burst into her room and declared his love. Shocked and embarrassed, Power asked him to leave and they parted soon after. He apologized by letter to her and obtained forgiveness from his wife. Toynbee’s encounter with Power may have marked a watershed in his life, for in poetry written soon afterward he invoked for the first time the help of an unknown God in conquering his sexual passions. Power’s engagement with Johnston ended and she married her former research assistant, Munia Postan, ten years her junior, in 1937. Maxine Berg, *A Woman in History: Eileen Power, 1889-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 175-177; William McNeill, *Arnold Toynbee: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 142-145.

¹³¹ Berg, *A Woman in History: Eileen Power, 1889-1940*, 222, 224, 225, 228, 230.

twelve chapters, each on a different city; it began: “Once upon a time...,” since the Power sisters set out to tell a story, not to offer a compilation of facts. The first two cities were Athens and Rome, “for Western civilization was the creation not of nations, but of these two city-states.”¹³² Curiously, the city of London is left out of the book. The others were: Jerusalem, Constantinople, Venice, Bruges, Amsterdam, Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Moscow; the book ended with Geneva, the home of the League of Nations, thus leaving the reader with Power’s central message and hope for future peace.

For Trevelyan, the national community gave meaning and structure to history. For Power, both the urban community and her ideal of the world community served this purpose. Christopher Dawson focused on the *cultural* community.

Dawson set out to write the history of culture. He knew what this did not mean: unlike Belloc and Knowles, Dawson would never write from the national perspective—none of his own book titles ever contained the word “England” or “Britain.” The closest he came was his *Spirit of the Oxford Movement* (1933), in his work for the Sword of the Spirit movement during the Second World War, and in a lengthy essay on William Langland in *The English Way* (1933). In this essay Dawson’s imbrication of history and literature showed that he was capable of Bellocian biographical method. This was not Dawson’s usual manner, however. Rather, his method was closer to that of Knowles’s wide sweep over an historical “field of folk” (a wonderful phrase!), as when Dawson contextualized Langland in this essay with the following brush strokes:

The fourteenth century was...the age of the Great Schism and the Black Death and the Hundred Years’ War, but it was also the age of Dante and Petrarch, of St. Catherine and St. Bridget, of Tauler and Suso and Ruysbroeck, an age of poets and mystics and saints. It was the breakdown of the universal theocratic order of mediaeval Christendom and the rise of political nationalism and religious division, and at the same time it witnessed the passing of the old agrarian and feudal society and the rise of capitalism and urban industrialism.¹³³

In this passage Dawson passed over a wide landscape and placed its inhabitants in their spiritual, social, economic, European, and military contexts—all as a concise background to help understand the Englishman William Langland. Though Dawson wrote on European-wide themes, like Acton and Belloc and Power, and he had lived

¹³² Eileen Power and Rhoda Power, *Cities and Their Stories: An Introduction to the Study of European History* (London: A. & C. Black, 1927), v, 1.

¹³³ Christopher Dawson, “William Langland (1333—?1399): *The Vision of Piers Plowman*,” in *The English Way: Studies in English Sanctity from St. Bede to Newman*, ed. Maisie Ward (London: Sheed & Ward, 1933), 160-161. Hilaire Belloc contributed an essay on St. Thomas of Canterbury to this volume, as did David Knowles on St. Wulstan of Worcester.

and studied abroad as a young man (Switzerland, Sweden, Germany), he was thoroughly English in his sentiments, religion, and manner of life. Dawson wrote as an Englishman, but seldom about England.

In *The Age of the Gods* (1928) he wrote that, “During the last two centuries the history of Europe has been given an almost exclusively national interpretation. And since the unit is a political one, the method of interpretation has tended to be political also, so that history has often sunk to the level of political propaganda.... This state of things was one of the great predisposing causes of the late War, and it is certain that the peoples of Europe will never be able to co-operate in peace, so long as they have no knowledge of their common cultural tradition and no revelation of the unity of European civilisation.” He continued: “the alternative to the nationalist conception of history is the cultural or sociological one which goes behind the political unit and studies that fundamental unity which we term a culture.”¹³⁴ He applied this sociological perspective to European history as a whole in *The Making of Europe* (1932). Reviewers of this book clearly understood that Dawson’s object was to intentionally undermine nationalist interpretations of history.¹³⁵

The word “culture” played a central role in Dawson’s understanding of history. He borrowed this term from anthropology. During the 1920s, anthropology reached its mature form as the concept “culture” gained a new position as a theoretical entity with explanatory power over human action and thought.¹³⁶ Christopher Dawson read the

¹³⁴ ———, *The Age of the Gods: A Study in the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient East* (London: John Murray, 1928), xii-xiii.

¹³⁵ Harold Martin Stannard, “The Medieval Synthesis,” review of *The Making of Europe*, *Times Literary Supplement* (1932): 457; F. McEachran, review of *The Making of Europe*, *Criterion* XII (1933): 290; H. A. L. Fisher, “European Unity,” review of *The Making of Europe*, *English Review* LV (1932): 98.

¹³⁶ Mark W. Risjord, “Ethnography and Culture,” in *Philosophy of Anthropology and Sociology*, ed. Stephen P. Turner and Mark W. Risjord (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 2007), 402, 407. The word culture has a long and complicated history. As a noun, it has meant the cultivation of soil, or tillage, since the fifteenth century. In the sixteenth it picked up the meaning of cultivation or development of the mind, manners, faculties. In the seventeenth it indicated refinement of mind, taste, manners; artistic or intellectual development. Only in the nineteenth did the word also pick up the meaning of a *way of life* of a people—their distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour, products. See OED, “culture” (accessed 13 April 2009). This latter development grew out of the Romantic movement in Germany, France, and England as a social and historical “application of an alternative idea of human development: alternative, that is, to the ideas now centred on ‘civilization’ and ‘progress’”. This application was exceptionally complicated. It was used to emphasize national and traditional cultures, including the new concept of folk-culture. It was used to attack what was seen as the ‘mechanical’ character of the new civilization then emerging: both for its abstract rationalism and for the ‘inhumanity’ of current industrial development” (79). This sense of the word as a common way of life or a people or a period entered into anthropology in the later nineteenth century, as in Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1870). See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana/Croom Helm, 1976), 79-80; Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (London:

books of the new anthropologists and developed a highly original history of culture in interwar Britain. One school of anthropology that deeply influenced Dawson during the years of his intellectual formation was that of the Franz Boas (1858-1942). Boas was the German-American pioneer of modern anthropology. One finds the books of those associated or directly trained by Boas in the bibliographies of Dawson's books, such as A. L. Kroeber, R. H. Lowie, and Clark Wissler; later Ruth Benedict influenced Dawson's Edinburgh Gifford Lectures. The major contribution of Boasian anthropology was commitment to three principles: empirical method, a fluid and dynamic idea of culture, and cultural relativism. Dawson adopted all of these ideas in his own work—a highly unusual move for a Catholic scholar working in the interwar period. He noted that by the 1920s “cultural units” in anthropology had come to be the primary objects of study.¹³⁷

Today the word “culture” often means something like the “significance that we attach to events through the mediation of language.”¹³⁸ Cultural history is understood as the “study of the construction of the subject, the extent to which and the mechanisms through which individuals are attached to identities, the shapes and characteristics of those identities, the role the process of self-constitution plays in the disruption or stabilization of political formations, and the relation of all these processes to distinctions of gender, ethnicity, and class.”¹³⁹ Dawson, however, drew a more sociological understanding of culture from Boasian anthropology which attempted to describe the real world. Therefore, he understood culture as a community at once founded on the life of nature *and* on common understanding. It was a common way of life involving concrete things and places as well as common linguistic and thought worlds.¹⁴⁰ It resulted from the contact of a particular people with a particular place. From the interactions of cultures, new technologies, new religious ideas, new and distinct ways of life (cultures) could arise. A culture could be either smaller or larger than a state. It existed in a symbiotic relationship with the state or states, such

Chatto & Windus, 1958). Dawson also credited the Romantic movement for realizing that a culture formed an organic unity, “with its own social traditions and its own spiritual ideals....” See Dawson, “The Kingdom of God and History,” 285.

¹³⁷ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 50.

¹³⁸ Jack High, “Humane Economics: An Introduction to the Work of Don Lavoie,” in *Humane Economics: Essays in Honor of Don Lavoie*, ed. Jack High (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2006), 19.

¹³⁹ Mark Poster, *Cultural History and Postmodernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 10.

¹⁴⁰ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 66.

as the city or temple states of Mesopotamia. If these micro-states, such as Ur, grew out of Sumerian culture (a “confused world of city states”), those city states also contributed to the economic, intellectual, and religious development of that wider and durable culture of Sumeria which could survive even foreign oppressors and changing political configurations. Thus Dawson could write of the “Sumerian City State and its Culture.”¹⁴¹

Dawson distinguished his study of culture from Arnold Toynbee’s study of *civilization* in *A Study of History* (1934-1961). In his final volume, Toynbee described how at first, early in life, he took his native England as his starting-point for historical study. “I then duly rejected the self-regarding hallucination of mistaking the England of my time for the culmination of history,” he wrote. “I found that England, taken by itself, was not, in fact, an ‘intelligible field of study’ either in my time or at any earlier date since the time when such a thing as England had first become discernible on the political map. I therefore went in search of the minimum unit, of which England is a part, that might be found intelligible if treated as being self-contained, and I found this in the Western Civilization.”¹⁴² This led him on to the discovery of other civilizations, and together these were the subjects of his *Study*. However, Dawson described the difference between “culture” and “civilization” and explained why the first and essential basis of history must not be the study of the latter but rather of the former:

The fact is that a civilization of any but the most simple and archaic kind is a far more complex phenomenon than the philosophers of history have realized. No doubt it is always based on a particular original process of cultural creativity which is the work of a particular people. But at the same time it always tends to become a super-culture—an extended area of social communication which dominates and absorbs other less advanced or less powerful cultures and unites them in an ‘oecumene,’ an international and intercultural society; and it is this extension of the area of communication that is the essential characteristic of civilization as distinguished from lower forms of culture.

The higher civilizations usually represent a fusion of at least two independent traditions of culture.... Hence I do not believe it is possible to study the high civilizations satisfactorily until we have succeeded in analyzing their different cultural components. In other words, the essential basis of the study of history must be, not just a comparative study of the higher civilizations, but a study of their constituent cultures, and here we must follow, not the grand synoptic method of the philosophers of history, but the more laborious and meticulous scientific technique of the social anthropologists.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ ———, *The Age of the Gods: A Study in the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient East*, 118.

¹⁴² Arnold Toynbee, *Reconsiderations*, vol. XII, *A Study of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 162. Toynbee admired Dawson’s work on world history and referenced him forty-four times in this final volume of his *Study*.

¹⁴³ Christopher Dawson, “Arnold Toynbee and the Study of History,” in *Dynamics of World History*, by Christopher Dawson, ed. John J. Mulloy (1956; Wilmington: ISI Books, 2002), 417. This was originally published in *International Affairs* XXXI (April 1955): 149-159, under the title “Toynbee’s Study of History: The Place of Civilizations in History.”

Dawson here distinguished between the cultures of particular peoples and the “super-culture” that they tend to become, which is a “civilization” or an “extended area of social communication” creating an “international and intercultural society.”

Dawson’s sociological definition of civilization differed from other moralistic descriptions of his day, either positive, as in high intellectual, artistic, and behavioral standards (e.g., Clive Bell’s *Civilization* of 1928); or negative, as in conquering, exploiting, and purveying barbarities around the world (e.g., Leonard Woolf’s *Imperialism and Civilization* of 1928).¹⁴⁴ Dawson *did* write about “civilization,” as in “Progress and Decay in Ancient and Modern Civilization” (1925), but even in that article he stated that “any sound science of social progress must concern itself first and last with the concrete historical and individual cultures and not with the achievement of civilization in the abstract.”¹⁴⁵ Dawson maintained that position consistently throughout his life, which meant that he tried to ground any broad discussion of “civilization” on concrete knowledge of its component cultures. This was his strategy, from *The Making of Europe* (1932), to *Religion and Culture* (1948) and *The Crisis of Western Education* (1961). Culture formed the pre-political basis of his reflections on modern politics, as in *Religion and the Modern State* (1935). He did this because the “state is not, as the nineteenth-century historians believed, the ultimate social unit and the final end of historical study. The cultural unity is both wider and deeper than that of the state. It is not an intellectual abstraction or a by-product of the political process. It is itself the fundamental social reality on which all the other social phenomena are dependent.”¹⁴⁶

Dawson’s focus on the “cultural unity” of Europe, for example, allowed him to position himself between nationalist history and abstract internationalism. He wrote in 1932:

[History from the nationalist point of view] has undermined and vitiated the whole international life of modern Europe. It found its nemesis in the European war, which represented a far deeper schism in European life than all the many wars of the past, and its consequences are to be seen today in the frenzied national rivalries which are bringing economic ruin on the whole of Europe.

Today there is no lack of thinkers who realise the dangers of this state of things, but with few exceptions they are as oblivious of the European tradition as their opponents. They put their faith in an abstract internationalism which has no historic foundation, and consequently

¹⁴⁴ Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 23, 27.

¹⁴⁵ Christopher Dawson, “Progress and Decay in Ancient and Modern Civilization,” in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1956; Wilmington: ISI Books, 2002), 59-60.

¹⁴⁶ ———, “Sociology as a Science,” in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1956; Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002), 20.

they provoke a fresh outburst of nationalist sentiment which is in some respects more excessive than anything the nineteenth century experienced.

The evil of nationalism does not consist in its loyalty to the traditions of the past or in its vindication of national unity and the right of self determination. What is wrong is the identification of this unity with the ultimate and inclusive unity of culture which is a supernational thing.

The ultimate foundation of our culture is not the nation state, but the European unity. It is true that this unity has not hitherto achieved political form, and perhaps it may never do so; but for all that it is a real society, not an intellectual abstraction, and it is only through their communion in that society that the different national cultures have attained their actual form.¹⁴⁷

Dawson called for a new kind of history written from the European point of view, not the national. He did not mean this to be—in today’s language—a *Eurocentric* history, however: “We need not fear that this [focus on Europe] will prejudice the cause of international peace or cause an increase of hostility between Europe and the non-European cultures. ...If a true world civilisation is ever to be created, it will not be by ignoring the existence of the great historic traditions of culture, but rather by an increase of mutual comprehension.” He continued with his punch-line: “But before it is possible to give European culture its due place in the international society of the future, it is first necessary to undo the false view of the past that has gained currency during the last century and to recover an historic sense of the European tradition.”¹⁴⁸

Dawson very much agreed with Power on the need for common historical ideas and the ideal of world peace. Why, then, did he sound a cautious note about internationalism? For Dawson, the “internationalism” championed by “Liberalism, Socialism, and international finance”¹⁴⁹ was an abstraction with few historical roots. He probably would have agreed with the American poet Robert Frost (1874-1963), who said the following in a talk delivered in his characteristic style at Amherst College in 1930:

I have been where I came near getting up and walking out on the people who thought that they had to talk against nations, against nationalism, in order to curry favor with internationalism. Their metaphors are all mixed up. They think that because a Frenchman and an American and an Englishman can all sit down on the same platform and receive honors together, it must be that there is no such thing as nations. That kind of bad thinking springs from a source we all know. I should want to say to anyone like that: “Look! First I want to be a person. And I want you to be a person, and then we can be as interpersonal as you please. We can pull each other’s noses—do all sorts of things. But, first of all, you have got to have the personality. First of all, you have got to have the nations and then they can be as international as they please with each other.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity*, 8-9.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹⁵⁰ Robert Frost, “Education by Poetry,”

<http://www.en.utexas.edu/amlit/amlitprivate/scans/edbypo.html> (accessed 7 April 2009). First published as “Education by Poetry: A Meditative Monologue” in the *Amherst Graduates’ Quarterly*

Anthropology and sociology taught Dawson to begin historical investigation by focusing on real human communities in their particularity. They showed him how to recognize, on the one hand, the importance of boundaries for cultural identity (Frost's "First I want to be a person"), and on the other hand, that boundaries can be porous (Frost's "Then we can be as interpersonal as you please"). The League of Nations and the interwar international movement failed, Dawson wrote in 1942, because only superficial attention was given to the fundamental sociological problem of the *nature* of the state and of the nation—as in that statement of Catholic international principles, the *Code of International Ethics* (1937) prepared by the International Union of Social Studies, which simply adopted, he thought, the Aristotelian conception of the city state and applied it forthwith to the nations states of modern Europe. Furthermore, "The modern tendency for every State or group of States to identify itself with one of the rival types of political ideology is as fatal to any kind of world order as were the religious wars of the past. ...The true basis of international life is to be found not ideological unity, but in a community of culture."¹⁵¹ Dawson went on to quote from Edmund Burke's *Letters on the Regicide Peace* (1795-1797) in which Burke wrote of the "similitude throughout Europe of religion, laws and manners" and that, "It is with nations as with individuals. Nothing is so strong a tie of amity between nations and nation as correspondence in laws, customs, manners and habits of life. They are obligations written in the heart."¹⁵² This was what Dawson meant by the European "cultural unity" that lay behind his critique of the League of Nations, which "created a juridical skeleton of international order, but not the living body of a spiritual community."¹⁵³

This episode 2 has tried to examine different responses historians made to questions about historical writing raised by the Great War. For Trevelyan, the war and postwar years confirmed the value of English liberal values. Thus, he sought to keep those values alive by encouraging popular national identity in his writings in contrast to the political instability so apparent on the Continent. The much younger Eileen Power

XX (February 1931): 75-85. This address was given by Frost as part of the annual meeting of the Alumni Council of Amherst College, November 14-15, 1930—see the invitation and announcement regarding the meeting in ACA, box 15, folder 19. I am very grateful to Peter Nelson of the ACA for finding this information for me.

¹⁵¹ Christopher Dawson, *The Judgment of the Nations* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1942), 81, 85, 86.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 86-87. Dawson referenced *Letters on the Regicide Peace I*, ed. by E. J. Payne, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1866-1878), III, 80-81.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 146-147.

avored the urban community, the international community of medieval Europe, and the world community. She and Trevelyan both contributed much to the awakening of historical imagination by their attempts to communicate history to the public. The “new community” Dawson indicated in his historical work after the Great War was the cultural community, the common ways of life and thought and love¹⁵⁴ of a particular people. This meant that study of “super-cultures” such as the society of peoples called “Europe” had to be grounded in regional studies of local and constitutive cultures. An important theme of Dawson’s historiography, then, was to turn attention to that community so obscured by the dust raised by struggling nations: Europe. He proposed this not in the arrogant spirit of the nineteenth century, assuming European pre-eminence, but in the humble, Frostian sense quoted above: self understanding must precede mutual understanding. He tried to reorient studies of Europe as the necessary prerequisite to understanding Europe’s larger context in the world, a project he worked toward for his entire life, as in *The Making of Europe* (1932) and *Understanding Europe* (1952).

Dawson’s entire cultural and historiographical project, however, rested on a reassessment of the epistemological foundations of the British empirical tradition of historical writing.

Episode 3: Dawson’s Cultural Critique of Empirical History

The American historian and humanist Lewis Mumford (1895-1990) wrote to Dawson in 1924: “Do you find any movement setting in towards the history of culture and civilization, outside the Le Play House group in England? Things are coming very slowly in America; for our historians are still exercising a sort of gymnastic rigor in dealing with the Document, as they have been taught to do by the French and German archivists, and they are slow to see that their narrow interpretation of the ‘document’ leaves them ignorant of a great deal of unwritten history that has nevertheless left its imprint.”¹⁵⁵ Besides responding to the problems of religious history and of nationalism, Dawson’s history of culture sought to broaden the source-base of history and examine a wider field, as Mumford recognized. Hence his history of culture was essentially a critique of the epistemological foundations of the dominant British

¹⁵⁴ Luisa Passerini, *Europe in Love, Love in Europe: Imagination and Politics between the Wars* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 79.

¹⁵⁵ Mumford to Dawson, 24 May 1924, STA, box 15, folder 58 “Mumford, Lewis.”

historiographical tradition of the twentieth century—"empirical history." What was this tradition?

Lord Acton had lived during the exciting "age of archives" (or the "documentary age" as he called it himself¹⁵⁶), when new historical sources in national archives became available for the first time. One is not surprised, then, that the later Acton seemed to espouse a positivist attitude toward the historical sources and imply that history was the key to truth for him. The word "positivist" does not mean here the positivism of the French philosopher and sociologist Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Rather, it denotes the epistemological theory that regards only sense perceptions as the admissible basis for human knowledge. The positivist will only deal with "matters of fact"; and suddenly, piles of new facts (documents) were available in national archives. Systematic archival research methods thus naturally began to embody a positive (or empirical) approach to knowledge, as well as a focus on political history (Acton: "For the science of politics is the one science that is deposited by the stream of history, like grains of gold in the sand of a river..."¹⁵⁷). Research methods and a particular philosophy of knowledge coalesced to create a new scientific or empirical historiography. By 1900, the key tenets of this movement were: (1) the rigorous examination of historical evidence, verified by references; (2) impartial research, devoid of *a priori* beliefs and prejudices; and (3) an inductive method of reasoning, from the particular to the general. The theory of knowledge implied by these principles suggested that the past existed independently of the mind and was both observable and verifiable, and that it was possible to be objective because the truth of an historical account rested upon its correspondence to the facts (Acton's "grains of gold").¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Acton, *A Lecture on the Study of History*, 19.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵⁸ Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 3. Acton on science: "Theirs [scientists] is the logic of discovery, the demonstration of the advance of knowledge and the development of ideas, which as the earthly wants and passions of men remain almost unchanged, are the charter of progress, and the vital spark in history." See: Acton, *A Lecture on the Study of History*, 55. "Empirical history" has also been called "modernist history," as in Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism 1870-1970*. John Henry Newman wrote: "Much is said in this day by men of science about the duty of honesty in what is called the pursuit of truth,—by 'pursuing truth' being mean the pursuit of facts. It is just now reckoned a great moral virtue to be fearless and thorough in inquiry into [physical and historical] facts...." See John Henry Newman, *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*, vol. I (1837; London: Longmans, Green, 1891), Preface to the 3rd ed., liii, liv.

Upon scientific method and a corresponding empirical theory of knowledge, *The Cambridge Modern History* was planned by Acton. In his 1898 letter to contributors to the huge project, he wrote: "Our scheme requires that nothing shall reveal the country, the religion, or the party to which the writers belong." This neutrality was essential "not only on the ground that impartiality is the character of legitimate history, but because the work is carried on by men acting together for no other object than the increase of accurate knowledge."¹⁵⁹ In his great inaugural lecture as regius professor of modern history (1895), Acton specifically embraced the view that the opening of the archives made history into a progressive discipline destined to make history "independent of historians."¹⁶⁰

The regius professor of modern history at Cambridge following Acton's death in 1902 was J. B. Bury. Bury's inaugural lecture was called "The Science of History" and advocated "scrupulously exact conformity to facts" in order to present readers with "untainted and unpainted truth." Knowledge of the past guided human evolution, he thought, so a clear conception of history was imperative. True history "can be attained only through the discovery, collection, classification, and interpretation of facts,—through scientific research."¹⁶¹

Others linked the methods of the natural sciences with history as well. In 1920 A. F. Pollard (1869-1948) announced the creation of a new Institute of Historical Research in London which would be an "historical laboratory." Pollard used the language of the physical sciences to legitimize the aims of this new school. He wrote: "the real historian has learnt from the real man of science that patient, original, and minute investigation is the only sure foundation of truth."¹⁶² Two decades later, in a review of Marjorie Morgan's *The English Lands of the Abbey of Bec* (1946), David Knowles praised the book with the words: "Miss Morgan's objective and scientific presentation of economic facts may serve both as a touchstone and as a model."¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Lord Acton, "Letter to Contributors to the *Cambridge Modern History* [1898]," in *Essays in the Liberal Interpretation of History*, ed. William H. McNeill (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 397.

¹⁶⁰ Acton, *A Lecture on the Study of History*, 18, 19.

¹⁶¹ Bury, *An Inaugural Lecture, Delivered in the Divinity School Cambridge on January 26, 1903*, 11, 24.

¹⁶² A. F. Pollard, "A School of Historical Research," *Contemporary Review* CXVIII (1920): 507, 513.

¹⁶³ David Knowles, "Estate of Bec Abbey," review of *The English Lands of the Abbey of Bec*, *Economic History Review* XVI (1946): 149.

Devotion to facts and method was not limited to Britain or to merely political history. For example, in the great tradition of French ecclesiastical history there appeared in 1912 the first volume of the *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique*—a many-volume scholarly project still incomplete today after nearly one hundred years! Consider the following quotation from the preface by the editors:

Notre prétention étant de livrer au public une œuvre originale et scientifique, nous avons fait appel pour chaque article, ou pour chaque catégorie d'articles similaires, aux hommes les plus compétents, savants déjà illustres, érudits locaux, jeunes historiens formés aux meilleurs écoles.

...Nous croyons faire une œuvre vraiment utile et vraiment nouvelle, qui servira les deux grandes causes auxquelles nous avons donné notre vie, celle de l'Église et celle de la science.¹⁶⁴

Notice the use of the word “science” in this quotation: it was used here not to refer to biology or physics, but to a method of careful research and clear organization of historical facts. The word was used by the editors to legitimize the volume at hand and to provide the clear standard by which they chose contributors to the volume: the utilization of “scientifique” methods. In English, the term “science” commonly denotes the “systematic natural science or a logic of inquiry and explanation modeled on the natural sciences....” In the languages of the Continent, however, “*Wissenschaft* (German), *science* (French), *scienza* (Italian), *ciencia* (Spanish), or *nauk* (Russian) denote a systematic approach to any sphere of knowledge, including the humanities, guided by methods of investigation accepted by a community of scholars.”¹⁶⁵ British (and American) historians, however, commonly held images of the natural sciences in their minds when they wrote of historical method: observe the *facts* objectively (“value-free”), arrange them properly, and they will reveal their inner connections.¹⁶⁶

By the early twentieth century, in the English-speaking world especially, the empirical knowledge of the modern physical sciences, and their intellectual

¹⁶⁴ *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, vol. I (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1912), vi, vii. Préface par Alfred Baudrillart (1859-1942). English translation (my own): “Our claim being to deliver to the public an original and scientific work, we have, for each article or for each category of similar articles, appealed to the men most competent, the scholars already illustrious, ...and the young historians formed in the best schools. ...We believe that we are creating a work truly useful and truly new, which will serve the two great causes to which we have given our lives: that of the Church and that of science.” For other examples, see A. Cauchie, “Les Études d'histoire ecclésiastique,” *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* I (1900); J. Lebreton and Jacques Zeiller, *L'Église primitive*, vol. I, *Histoire de l'église* (Bloud & Gay, 1934).

¹⁶⁵ Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 17.

¹⁶⁶ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 34, 157.

techniques for attaining it, had become the ideal of human knowledge in general.¹⁶⁷ Thus, in order for Dawson to integrate ecclesiastical and political history into a wider history of culture and of religion (episode 1), and in order for him to challenge the nationalist historiography which could easily disguise itself behind the curtain of “objectivity” (episode 2), he had to think carefully about the cultural consequences of scientific history and sociology, one of which—in the words of philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938)—was the tendency to “take for *true being* what is actually a *method*....”¹⁶⁸ He did this through what can be called his “cultural critique” of empirical history. This phrase “cultural critique” is used for two reasons: (1) Dawson viewed science as a mode of human thought existing *within* a cultural and historical context,¹⁶⁹ and (2) he considered scientific thinking as but one particular and limited mode of human thought among others in the effort to understand human life in history. This third episode in British historiography will try to explain the implicit logic behind these two positions.

Dawson devoted a considerable amount of thought to science. It was a central theme in his 1929 *Progress and Religion*. In 1931 he published two articles on the rise of medieval science and one sociological piece on contemporary scientific ideals. In 1932 appeared one chapter devoted to science in his book *The Modern Dilemma*, and in 1934 he published a chapter called “Sociology as a Science” in *Science Today: The Scientific Outlook on World Problems Explained by Leading Exponents of Modern Scientific Thought*.¹⁷⁰

Dawson described science as follows: “Physical science, in fact, is nothing more or less than measurement. It does not reveal the intrinsic nature of things, but deals simply with their quantitative relations and variations. Instead of giving an exhaustive causal explanation of reality, it offers a translation of reality into mathematical

¹⁶⁷ Hayden White, “Collingwood and Toynbee: Transitions in English Historical Thought,” *English Miscellany* VIII (1957): 151.

¹⁶⁸ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (1936; Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 51.

¹⁶⁹ Collingwood and Toynbee also viewed science historically as *another* aspect of knowledge not as *the* form of knowledge; see White, “Collingwood and Toynbee: Transitions in English Historical Thought,” 162, 176.

¹⁷⁰ Christopher Dawson, “Scholasticism and the Origins of the European Scientific Tradition,” *Clergy Review* II (1931); Christopher Dawson, “The Origins of the European Scientific Tradition: St. Thomas and Roger Bacon,” *Clergy Review* II (1931); Christopher Dawson, “The Scientific Ideal,” *Listener* 18 November 1931; Christopher Dawson, *The Modern Dilemma* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932); Christopher Dawson, “Sociology as a Science,” in *Science Today: The Scientific Outlook on World Problems Explained by Leading Exponents of Modern Scientific Thought*, ed. J. G. Crowther and Sir J. Arthur Thomson (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1934).

symbols or imagery. ...Science provides, not a moral dynamic, but an intellectual technique.”¹⁷¹ For Dawson, there was, strictly speaking, no such thing as Science—only the sciences of physics, chemistry, and the rest. “A universal science is nothing else but a philosophy. The moment that the scientist leaves his laboratory and attempts to construct a universal theory of reality, he ceases to be a scientist and becomes a philosopher.”¹⁷²

As mentioned, there were two key principles of Dawson’s cultural critique. (1) *Science as Historical Reality*: “science” was not a force in itself. Rather, the kind of reasoning termed “science” existed *within* the mind of the human person and hence within history. Drawing from the work of the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) and the French physicist and philosopher of science Pierre Duhem (1861-1916), Dawson studied the medieval foundations of modern science. For him, such a study was crucial to understanding the true nature of modern science because the very possibility of science depended on that “faith in the ultimate rationality of the universe, which the modern world inherited from mediaeval scholasticism.”¹⁷³ Modern science did not arise out of nowhere in the seventeenth century. According to Whitehead, medieval theological thinking had instilled in Western minds the habit and the inclination toward definite and exact thought which necessarily preceded the rise of modern science.¹⁷⁴ In Dawson’s view, the roots of modern science reached back to the Renaissance when the “aesthetic attitude to life gave a powerful impulse to the study of nature. The art of the Renaissance was an art of observation and experiment, and it had a direct influence on the development of the study of anatomy and perspective. Thus it was the greatest of the artists of the 15th century—Leonardo da Vinci—who first realized the possibilities of modern science—not the abstract speculative knowledge which was the Hellenic scientific ideal, but a new science of experiment and applied knowledge which would give man the complete mastery over nature.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 174, 176.

¹⁷² ———, “Sociology as a Science,” 79-80.

¹⁷³ ———, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 144-145; Dawson, “Scholasticism and the Origins of the European Scientific Tradition,” 109.

¹⁷⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (1925; New York: Free Press, 1953), 11-12. See also: Dawson, “Scholasticism and the Origins of the European Scientific Tradition,” 113; Dawson, “The Origins of the European Scientific Tradition: St. Thomas and Roger Bacon,” 203.

¹⁷⁵ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 144.

This contrasting of various “ideals of science” was an important—but not much developed—feature of Dawson’s historical study of science. He wrote that the “history of science is not that of a simple continuous development. It takes a different form in every culture, Babylonian, Greek, Moslem and Christian, and until a culture has created a scientific ideal that is in harmony with its own spirit, it cannot bear scientific fruit.”¹⁷⁶ Here Dawson espoused (nearly thirty years before Thomas S. Kuhn’s famous essay on “scientific paradigms”¹⁷⁷) a culturally relative view—not of scientific method—but of what he called the “scientific ideal.” Since past human beings were the embodied-thinkers responsible for scientific thoughts and actions, it is legitimate to ask what position in front of reality, what ideal, motivated those scientific enquiries. For the Greeks, Dawson wrote, that position or ideal was not to *do* but to *know* and to contemplate the order of the heavens. The ideal of Arabic scientific learning was individual power through magical control of nature, and that of medieval Europe became, beginning with Roger Bacon, the social ideal of world conquest and the subjugation of nature which would help bring about the kingdom of God.¹⁷⁸ In this way Dawson distinguished between science as a method of thought, and the “scientific ideal” which was a cultural product and an imaginative vision that motivated scientific thinking and action. The scientific ideal gave direction to that method of thought that one calls “scientific.” Scientific reasoning operated not from a view from nowhere, but from a cultural position that was an historical given in the life of the individual thinker.

(2) *Science as a Particular Mode of Human Thought*: Besides existing within human history and culture, scientific reasoning, understood as essentially mathematical and intellectual technique, had to acknowledge limitations when applied to the human world. Dawson’s justification for this position can best be seen in his essay on sociology. He wrote that, “From the beginning sociology has been haunted by the dream of explaining social phenomena by the mathematical and quantitative

¹⁷⁶ Christopher Dawson, *Medieval Essays* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America, 1954), 137. Thomas S. Kuhn wrote that, “The very existence of science depends upon vesting the power to choose between paradigms in the members of a special kind of community. Just how special that community must be if science is to survive and grow may be indicated by the very tenuousness of humanity’s hold on the scientific enterprise. ...Only the civilizations that descend from Hellenic Greece have possessed more than the most rudimentary science. The bulk of scientific knowledge is a product of Europe in the last four centuries. No other place and time has supported the very special communities from which scientific productivity comes.” See: Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962), 166-167.

¹⁷⁷ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

¹⁷⁸ Dawson, *Medieval Essays*, 138-140.

methods of the physical sciences and thus creating a science of society which will be completely mechanistic and determinist.” But the sociological systems created by this thinking “content themselves with generalizations that have no significance and with ‘laws’ which are nothing but false analogies [e.g., in comparing the laws of social change with the laws of thermodynamics].”¹⁷⁹

The solution, Dawson thought, was for sociology to study the relations between people and between society and its natural environment, with a multi-faceted method that could account for both quantitative categories *and* qualitative categories such as philosophical theories, religious beliefs, and literary or artistic traditions. The temptation for the sociologist was to reduce sociological explanation to the “simple” explanation of causal dependence utilized so effectively by the physical sciences. In other words, the great sociological pitfall was to reduce one of the two categories (quantitative or qualitative) to the other, to explain one in terms of the other.¹⁸⁰ The sociologist must “view the social process as the result of a complex series of interdependent factors. Material environment, social organization and spiritual culture all help to condition social phenomena, and we cannot explain the social process by one of them alone, and still less explain one of the three as the cause and origin of the other two.”¹⁸¹ In other words, as Dawson wrote elsewhere, nothing is less scientific than to either “transfer the methods of one science to another”¹⁸² or to perform an “illegitimate substitution of one category for another [e.g., Durkheim’s substitution of society for religion].”¹⁸³ The sciences were distinct (and therefore limited) modes of human thought.

The temptation for the social sciences to mimic the natural sciences had led to a false idealization of “neutrality” and “objectivity,” Dawson thought. “I am doubtful whether the scientific impartiality, which Mannheim rightly demands for the sociologist, does not often in fact conceal a negative and exclusive attitude to theology and metaphysics, which makes co-operation [between sociology and theology] impossible,” Dawson wrote to J. H. Oldham, the former secretary of the International Missionary Council (1921-1938), around 1940.¹⁸⁴ Several years later,

¹⁷⁹ ———, “Sociology as a Science,” 160.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 161, 163, 164.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 166-167.

¹⁸² ———, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 48.

¹⁸³ ———, “Sociology as a Science,” 166.

¹⁸⁴ Dawson to Oldham, no date, E-JHOP, box 9, folder 3. The letter was labeled “Confidential,” and judging by other letters and documents around this one the year was likely around 1940. Karl

when writing about the rise of the study of comparative religion in the late nineteenth century and its ideal of neutrality, he wrote: “Actually, however, this programme of philosophic neutrality proved to be impracticable. Both the comparative method and the concept of evolutionary development involved judgments of value which had philosophical implications.”¹⁸⁵ In 1960: “For the idea that the historian or the sociologist is in a privileged position, from which he can study any and every culture and religion in Olympian detachment, is really an absurdity and the source of countless errors and absurdities in thought and practice.”¹⁸⁶ The ideal of the modern historian to “transcend the tradition of his own society and to see history as one and universal” was in fact impossible because “such a universal history does not exist. There is as yet no history of humanity, since humanity is not an organized society with a common tradition or a common social consciousness.” Rather, the position of the historian should be one of humility: “The more learned and conscientious a historian is, the more conscious he is of the relativity of his own knowledge, and the more ready he is to treat the culture that he is studying as an end in itself, an autonomous world which follows its own laws and owes no allegiance to the standards and ideals of another civilization. For history deals with civilizations and cultures rather than civilization, with the development of particular societies and not with the progress of humanity.”¹⁸⁷

If “Olympian detachment” was not possible for the historian, neither could the techniques of historical criticism guarantee a sufficient explanation of the past. Consider the following quotation from 1951:

The academic historian is perfectly right in insisting on the importance of the techniques of historical criticism and research. But the mastery of these techniques will not produce great history, any more than a mastery of metrical technique will produce great poetry. For this something more is necessary—intuitive understanding, creative imagination, and finally a universal vision transcending the relative limitations of a particular field of historical study. The experience of the great historians such as Tocqueville and Ranke leads me to believe that a universal metahistorical vision of this kind, partaking more of the nature of religious contemplation than of scientific generalization, lies very close to the sources of their creative power.”¹⁸⁸

Mannheim (1893-1947) was a Jewish, Hungarian-born sociologist involved in Oldham’s discussion group called the Moot, which Dawson was also part of for a short time.

¹⁸⁵ Christopher Dawson, *Religion and Culture* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1948), 17.

¹⁸⁶ ———, *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 77.

¹⁸⁷ Dawson, “The Kingdom of God and History,” 286. He continued: “Consequently if we rely on history alone we can never hope to transcend the sphere of relativity; it is only in religion and metaphysics that we can find truths that claim absolute and eternal validity” (286-287).

¹⁸⁸ ———, “The Problem of Metahistory,” 309-310.

Here Dawson highlighted the value of critical research methods but also the necessity of intuition, imagination, and what he called “universal vision” in comprehending and communicating history. His attention to Tocqueville and Ranke was significant. For Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), author of the two-volume *De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835, 1840), the social forces at play throughout history and within man himself were not reconcilable. Man existed on the verge of two abysses, which were the animal and the angel side of human nature, a dualism suffusing the historical process as well as Tocqueville’s politics.¹⁸⁹ Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) wrote a massive corpus of scholarship including *Die Römischen Päpste* (1834-1836). Ranke, misunderstood as weak in ideas and only interested in reproducing facts,¹⁹⁰ strove to integrate particular facts into his conception of the unity of European history and the “universal view of events.” From a fragment in the 1830s:

Nevertheless those historians are also mistaken who consider history simply an immense aggregate of particular facts, which it behooves one to commit to memory. Whence follows the practice of heaping particulars upon particulars, held together only by some general moral principle. I believe rather that the discipline of history—at its highest—is itself called upon, and is able, to lift itself in its own fashion from the investigation and observation of particulars to a universal view of events, to a knowledge of the objectively existing relatedness.¹⁹¹

Behind Ranke’s willingness to immerse himself in the chaos of data and events which the historical record contained was his belief that an accurate picture of those facts would not result in a chaotic image but in a coherent vision.¹⁹² That belief, that commitment to a vision, was Ranke’s “pre-archival mind”:¹⁹³ that universal quality he brought to his research. Hence, for Dawson, the work of great historians like Tocqueville and Ranke was a constant conversation between *a priori* beliefs and *a posteriori* evidential experience.

Dawson was not alone in his critique of the empirical tradition and its exclusive devotion to “facts.” John Masefield, poet laureate of England 1930-1967, published his poem “Biography” in 1912 in which he wrote:

¹⁸⁹ White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 193, 197.

¹⁹⁰ Butterfield, *Man on His Past: The Study of the History of Historical Scholarship*, 100.

¹⁹¹ Leopold von Ranke, “Fragment from the 1830s,” in Fritz Stern, ed., *The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present* (New York: World, 1956), 59.

¹⁹² White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 190. Max Weber wrote: “That genuine artistry which, among the historians, Ranke possessed in such a grand measure, manifests itself through its ability to produce new knowledge by interpreting already *known* facts according to known viewpoints.” See: Max Weber, “‘Objectivity’ in the Social Sciences and Social Policy,” in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences: A Reader*, ed. Maurice Natanson (New York: Random House, 1963), 418 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁹³ Bentley, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction*, 41.

When I am buried, all my thoughts and acts
Will be reduced to lists of dates and facts,
And long before this wandering flesh is rotten
The dates which made me will be all forgotten....

...Dull with the ritual and records of death,
That frost of fact by which our wisdom gives
Correctly stated death to all that lives.¹⁹⁴

And Chesterton wrote in 1924: “The neglected side of English history does not consist of little things which the learned obscurely conceal, but rather of large things which the learned frequently ignore. Much of it can be learned, not only without any prodigy of book-learning, but practically without any books. It can be learned from large and obvious things, like the size of Gothic churches or the style of classical country houses.”¹⁹⁵

As in Masfield’s “frost of fact” and Chesterton’s wit, there was a particular concept of reason implicit in Dawson’s cultural critique of empirical history. He viewed historical reason as the coordination of pre-archival beliefs *and* induction (observation of past documents, artifacts, coins, literature). Unlike the objects of knowledge pursued in the political and intellectual history of Acton; the political and biographical, controversialist history of Belloc; the national history of Trevelyan; or the world history of Power, Dawson’s historical object was *culture*. He tried to write histories of culture which could serve as a common ground for questions arising in both secular and religious history. This meant looking behind the *state* to the bedrock cultural communities of history. In this way Dawson possessed an essentially “pre-political mind” as much as a “pre-archival mind” concerned with critical awareness of different imaginative visions that historians have brought to their research and their approach to historical “facts.”

Isolated facts of history were not per se historical. They could not speak for themselves or arrange themselves with other facts. To become truly historical, Dawson thought, facts had to be set in relation to (1) a social tradition and (2) the synthetic power of the mind of the historian. “Hence the essence of history is not to be found in facts but in traditions,” he wrote. “The pure fact is not as such historical. It only becomes historical when it can be brought into relation with a social tradition so

¹⁹⁴ John Masfield, “Biography,” Poet’s Corner, Bokshelf,
http://www.theotherpages.org/poems/gp1_11.html
(accessed 23 April 2008).

¹⁹⁵ G. K. Chesterton, *A Short History of England* (1917; London: Chatto & Windus, 1924), v.

that it is seen as part of an organic whole.” He gave an example: “A visitor from another planet who witnessed the Battle of Hastings would possess far greater knowledge of the facts than any modern historian, yet this knowledge would not be historical for lack of any tradition to which it could be related; whereas the child who says ‘William the Conqueror 1066’ has already made this atom of knowledge an historical fact by relating it to a national tradition and placing it in the time-series of Christian culture.” How did one set a fact in relation to its social tradition? One cannot “understand the past by applying the standards and values of our own age and civilization to it, but only by relating historical facts to the social tradition to which they belong and by using the spiritual beliefs and the moral and intellectual values of that tradition as the key to their interpretation.”¹⁹⁶

Secondly, facts could only be arranged into significant historical narratives against the background of a personal position taken, a judgment made, in front of reality. And interpretations of facts also had to be motivated by real questions relevant to the present generation reading the historian’s book. Otherwise, historians without a broad enough concept of reason to ask meaningful questions would—in the words of R. H. Tawney—“make a darkness, and call it research....”¹⁹⁷ For Dawson, then, historical thinking was essentially interpretive *and* critical/technical. As Hayden White wrote: “Knowledge is a product of a wrestling not only with the ‘facts’ but with one’s self.”¹⁹⁸ This linking of facts with interpretation by the subjective person was the foundation both of Dawson’s cultural critique of empirical history and of his historiographical project on the history of culture. Central to that project and to his own interpretation of history was *religion*.

¹⁹⁶ Dawson, “The Kingdom of God and History,” 285-286. This was originally a book chapter in the symposium *The Kingdom of God and History*, edited by H. G. Woods et. al. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938). In 1950 he recognized that the conflict of political ideologies during the interwar years and the “attempt of the new totalitarian states to create historical myths as a psychological basis of social unity, have all made us realize that history does not consist in the laborious accumulation of facts, but has a direct bearing on the fate of modern society.” Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, 13.

¹⁹⁷ R. H. Tawney, “The Study of Economic History,” *Economica* XIII (1933): 9, 10, 19.

¹⁹⁸ White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 192.

CHAPTER FIVE

Religion

“Religion is the key of history.”
—Christopher Dawson (1948)¹

Religio in classical Latin meant a sense of duty or reverence for sacred things; derivatively, it referred to worship in general. For medieval Christians the meaning of the word narrowed to describe followers of a particular “religious” rule, such as monks. Only as an aftermath of the Reformation did the word take on the more abstract meaning of a particular system of faith and worship centered on a set of doctrines either true or not true, Protestant or Catholic.² This identification of “religion” with a particular “church” lasted at least until the time of William James, the American philosopher and psychologist, who in 1902 wrote that “when we hear the word ‘religion’ nowadays, we think inevitably of some ‘church’ or other.”³ Behind James lay that tradition of “inner religion” of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) and so he naturally criticized the mental association of “religion” with “church.” To some, James wrote, “church” suggested hypocrisy and meanness, so the *real* locus of religion is in individual religious experience (and those feelings which generate personal conduct), not in corporate life or religious ideas. In this way he exemplified a profound change that had happened to the word religion, a change of great importance during the twentieth-century world of Western modernity: *real* religion is *personal* religion, as against collective and creedal religion.⁴

¹ Christopher Dawson, *Religion and Culture* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1948), 50.

² John Bossy, “Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim,” *Past and Present* XCV (1982): 4-6.

³ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Random House Modern Library, 1902), 328.

⁴ Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 7-8, 13. James’s father, Henry James Sr., was a follower of the teachings of Swedenborg. Dawson commented on the rise of James’s idea of religion: “Ever since the Reformation religion has been losing its control over public life and becoming more and more a matter of private opinion and subjective experience, and, as Mr. Tawney has shown, this religious individualism inevitably led to the economic individualism of the Industrial Revolution and ultimately to the abandonment of any attempt to regulate economic life on moral principles.” See Christopher Dawson,

At the same time, another concept of religion rose to dominance: religion as *object*. This idea of religion formed as a result of one of the great projects of Enlightenment modernity: social-scientific study of religion. In this tradition, religion has been “defined, measured and ‘understood’ through ‘empirical’ evidence spawned by the supposed ‘neutrality’ of social science. Social science has privileged a ‘rationalist’ approach to religion which...privileges numbers, counting religion by measures of members or worshippers, and ignores the unquantifiable in argument and methodology.” This approach studies religion as an institutional object and dichotomizes people into “the religious” and “the non-religious.” Social science has tended toward reductionism in its explanations of what religion *is* (simply empirical data) and what it *does*: that religion merely has “roles” or “functions” in society (as in government or education).⁵

If today religion is often conceived on the one hand as radically personal and even non-functional, and on the other as radically empirical and functional, then these contradictory concepts of religion can pose problems for the contemporary reader of Christopher Dawson’s writings. And Dawson himself did not always help the situation. In his quotation at the head of this chapter, “Religion is the key of history,” what did Dawson mean by “religion”? How could religion be a “key”? If in sixteenth-century Lyon, France, for example, the Catholic religion was intimate to the entirety of city life and the sacred could be enclosed in a thing—in a host, in a bone, in a building, in a piece of land,⁶ perhaps religion can be understood as an explanatory “key” to this place and time. However, in the modern “disenchanted world” of the “separation of church and state,” Dawson’s statement about religion as the “key of history” seems exaggerated and even nonsensical.

This chapter will not make an attempt to justify the importance of religion throughout Dawson’s many books or to prove that religion actually is the key of history. Rather, it will demonstrate both how religion as the “key of history” makes

"The Problem of Wealth," *Spectator* CXLVII (1931): 485. Dawson linked individualism to secularization: "The secularization of European culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was only made possible by the individualism which treated religion as a private matter, and left the human soul out of politics and economics. But in an organic culture this division of life is no longer possible." See Christopher Dawson, "Religion in an Age of Revolution," *Tablet* CLXVIII (24 October 1936): 550.

⁵ Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularization 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001), 11, 12.

⁶ Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Sacred and the Body Social in Sixteenth-Century Lyon," *Past and Present* XC (1981): 58, 62-63.

some sense in Dawson's own terms and why he wrote of religion in the way that he did. This will require examining the place of religion in Dawson's life, excavating the *idea* of religion underneath his texts, and relating that idea to the tendencies or traditions of thought about religion present at his time. This phrase "idea of religion" does not imply that Dawson thought of religion in only one way, or that no development in his thinking took place. Nor does it mean that Dawson simply ascribed "religion" to a department of the human mind in the abstract. Rather, his concept of religion was essentially linked to concrete personalities inhabiting a specific social environment and working within particular historical traditions. Dawson's "idea" of religion refers to the method of thought, the logic by which he explained religion as an historical phenomenon.

A central problem identified by Dawson in the interwar period was a division between religion and culture. "To the English mind religion is essentially a private matter, a question of personal opinion."⁷ "This separation of the inner world of the moral consciousness from the outer world of economics and politics," he wrote, "is the true cause of the spiritual tension and the economic disorder of modern society."⁸ In response to his historical situation, Dawson employed in his historiography an idea of religion as *bridge between this inner world and outer world*. "For religion is not to be identified with a particular element in life. It is the ordering of life as a whole...."⁹ In diverse ways throughout ancient and modern history, he argued, religion had always sought to connect "the depths of the Unconscious" with the "surface of the social order," religious experience with the mental and cultural worlds of human beings,¹⁰ the religious needs of the individual with the ordering of life as a whole.

In his efforts to write about this historical relation between religion and culture, as he saw it, there were two main traditions of thought that affected him during the interwar years. The first, focused on the *individual* and represented by William James, rose to prominence in the early twentieth century amongst scholars in Europe and America in various studies of mysticism and personal religious experience. The second, represented by Émile Durkheim, focused on the *social* function of religion. A later section of this chapter will travel widely and boldly in an attempt to survey these

⁷ Carl Schmitt, *The Necessity of Politics* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1931), Introduction, by Christopher Dawson, 10.

⁸ Dawson, "The Problem of Wealth," 486.

⁹ Schmitt, *The Necessity of Politics*, Introduction, by Christopher Dawson, 10.

¹⁰ Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, 20-22.

two traditions of the most important religious theorists of the early twentieth century. Several of these figures were selected to give the Gifford Lectures, as was Dawson. The justification for this tour around the world of religious thought is the difficulty of establishing the precise religious influences on Dawson or any figure. Thus, a survey of the thinkers Dawson actually engaged in his work, such as James, Frazer, Dewey, Freud, and Otto on the one hand, and Durkheim and Weber on the other, will lead to a strong and clear thesis about Dawson's thinking: he performed a gargantuan feat of synthesis in bringing together the tradition of James and the tradition of Durkheim by his idea of religion. He joined the mystical and the social as he tried to explain the double role religion plays in tension with culture.

This double role was that religion could serve either as a (1) "unifying force in the creation of a cultural synthesis" or as a (2) "revolutionary disruptive force in times of social change." But these two roles were more or less simultaneous, Dawson thought, so that a complex culture was always a "field of tension between opposing religious forces which are continually striving against one another."¹¹ Religion could serve both in favor of social alliance and unity (as in, for example, the Catholic processions during the more peaceful years of sixteenth-century Lyon) and in favor of revolutionary and disruptive social change (as in the apogee of the Huguenot movement in Lyon around 1562).¹²

By linking personal religious experience (or mysticism) to community and to culture through his idea of "religion as bridge" in his historiography, Dawson implicitly challenged preconceptions of his day which assumed religion to be either (1) merely personal or (2) merely social. He tried to locate the historical role of "religious experience" within cultural contexts and intellectual traditions, anticipating recent criticisms of the isolation of religious experience from propositional truths and/or cultural context. For example, primarily experience-based religion is inadequate, George Lindbeck argues, because it fails to account for the way human experience is conditioned and even made possible by language and cultural characteristics acquired prior to a "religious experience."¹³ Prior cultural context and

¹¹ Ibid., 202.

¹² Davis, "The Sacred and the Body Social in Sixteenth-Century Lyon," 50, 56-57.

¹³ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 33-34; Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*, 27-28. Also: "Relativism, by indiscriminately giving value to practically everything, has made 'experience' all-important. Yet, experiences, detached from any consideration of what is good or true, can lead, not to genuine freedom, but to moral or intellectual confusion, to a lowering of

language gives shape to experience; personal experience and communal culture cannot be separated. At the same time, for Dawson, religion could not be treated simply as an object of communal culture subject to social scientific study. Individuals could have real and creative roles: “The experience of Mohammed in the cave of Mount Hira, when he saw human life as transitory as the beat of a gnat’s wing in comparison with the splendour and power of the Divine Unity, has shaped the existence of a great part of the human race ever since.”¹⁴

Dawson most directly wrote on the topic of religion in a journal article for the *Dublin Review*, an encyclopedia article, a book chapter,¹⁵ and in his first series of Gifford Lectures, *Religion and Culture* (1948). Dawson’s most systematic, extensive, and important treatment of “religion and culture” was in his Gifford Lectures. The problem that motivated these writings was the nearly complete split, as Dawson saw it, between traditional religion and the society of interwar Britain (and that of the West generally). This perception of the “decline of religion” in British culture, discussed in a later section of this chapter, prompted him to study the relation between religion and culture in the past. The hope implicit behind much of Dawson’s work was that study of the relations between religion and culture in the past could help to bring these spheres of human experience back into conversation in his present.

This chapter will first discuss religion and Dawson’s early life, then his Gifford Lectures, and finally the two main traditions of religious theory in the early twentieth century—that of William James (individual) and that of Émile Durkheim (social).

Dawson’s Early Experience of Religion

Dawson published only two short examples of autobiography.¹⁶ In “Tradition and Inheritance” he specifically attacked the tradition of modern autobiography, “characterized by a spirit of romantic introspection and individualism,” as he saw it.

standards, to a loss of self-respect, and even to despair.” Benedict XVI, opening address of 17 July at World Youth Day 2008 in Sydney, Australia; quoted “The Year of Benedict” by Tim Drake, *National Catholic Register* (4-10 January, 2009), 1.

¹⁴ Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry* (1929; Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 68.

¹⁵ ———, “The Dark Mirror,” *Dublin Review* CLXXXVII (1930); Christopher Dawson, “Religion,” in *Chamber’s Encyclopedia* (London: George Newnes, 1950), XI; Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, chap. v, “Religion and the Origins of Civilization”.

¹⁶ Christopher Dawson, “Why I am a Catholic,” *Catholic Times* [London] 21 May 1926. Republished, in part, in *The Chesterton Review* IX (May 1983): 110-113. Christopher Dawson, “Tradition and Inheritance: Memories of a Victorian Childhood,” *Wind and the Rain* V & VI (1949). Republished in full as “Memories of a Victorian Childhood” in Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson* (New Brunswick, USA: Transaction, 1992): 221-239.

“Rousseau is the founder of modern autobiography,” Dawson wrote, “and he knew little and cared less about his cultural inheritance—all that mattered were his own feelings and his own experiences.”¹⁷ Dawson contrasted this with *Pietas* in the classical sense: “the cult of parents and kinsfolk and native place as the principles of our being, by whom and in which we are born and nourished....”¹⁸ Hence, in his own autobiographical pieces, Dawson’s *self* receded into the background of social tradition and the inheritance he received from past generations of his family amidst the late-Victorian world of rural England. “No one,” Dawson wrote, “could owe more to childhood impressions than I did. In fact it was then I acquired my love of history, my interest in the differences of cultures and my sense of the importance of religion in human life, as a massive, objective, unquestioned power that entered into everything and impressed its mark on the external as well as the internal world.”¹⁹

Looking back on his early life, Dawson recognized the social presence of religion as an important factor in his personal development. “In the England of the villages in which I lived as a child the Victorian order reigned unchallenged, and it still possessed a strong and living religious foundation.”²⁰ In the memory of the older Dawson, religion was for the younger Dawson something very much objective and outside himself. Indeed, the unique society around Hay in the Wye Valley between England and Wales where Dawson was born was a “sort of Anglican theocracy.” In that place the landowners were largely clergymen, “so that there was a complete unification of political, religious, economic and social authority and influence.”²¹ Dawson studied at Winchester from 1903-1904; here the powerful presence of the

¹⁷ Christopher Dawson, “Memories of a Victorian Childhood,” in *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, by Christina Scott (1984; New Brunswick: Transaction, 1992), 222. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was a French philosopher and author of the autobiography *Les Confessions* (published in two parts in 1782 and 1789). According to Dawson, within the autobiographical tradition since Rousseau “there is a positive antipathy to the past which makes men assert themselves as free individuals and reject their family tradition as an intolerable burden. Indeed some of the most characteristic modern biographies, such as those of Samuel Butler and Edmund Gosse, have been expressions of the revolt of the individual against the family and the bonds of his social inheritance” (222). Samuel Butler (1835-1902), novelist, was author of the semi-autobiographical *The Way of All Flesh* (1903). The biography Dawson likely referred to was that by Butler’s friend Henry Festing Jones, *Samuel Butler, Author of Erewhon (1835-1902): A Memoir* (2 vols., London: Macmillan, 1919). This work won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1919 for biography. Edmund Gosse (1849-1928), poet and friend of Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894), wrote his famous autobiography *Father and Son* (1907) which Dawson was likely referring to.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 222-223.

¹⁹ Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson* (1984; New Brunswick, USA: Transaction, 1992), quoted on 15. Scott cited “unpublished notes.”

²⁰ Dawson, “Why I am a Catholic,” 11.

²¹ ———, “Memories of a Victorian Childhood,” 224.

great cathedral of that town awed him as a “massive, objective, unquestioned power that impressed its seal on the outer and the inner world alike and held past and present together as a living whole.”²² Religion was an external force that had shaped both the personal and social experience of generations.

Besides late Victorian society and medieval architecture, nature also revealed the external character of religion to young Dawson. In 1896 the Dawson family moved to rural Yorkshire near Bolton Abbey on the River Wharfe. Besides the impression made by the Abbey itself, the running water of a small tributary of that river appealed to young Dawson’s mind. The appeal of the elemental force of nature had a certain literary and religious significance for him. He recalled:

For it was in the Old Testament, and there only, that I found these things written about, and it seemed clear to me that in those days they felt about these things as I did. ‘Deep calleth to deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts’, ‘Let the floods clap their hands, let the hills be joyful together.’ ‘The River of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river the river Kishon, O my soul thou has trodden down strength.’ ‘The glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream.’ Such things compensated me for the boredom of so much that seemed dull or incomprehensible in the long Anglican office and made me feel that religion was not simply concerned with the pious moralities which held such a prominent place in Victorian books for children, but stood close to that wonderful non-human world of the river and the mountain which I found around me.²³

Dawson retained a childhood association of religion with nature in his mature writing. “The life of pure spirit is religious,” he wrote, “and the life of the animal is also religious, since it is wholly united with the life-force that is its highest capacity of being. Only man is capable of separating himself alike from God and from Nature, of making himself his last end and living a purely self-regarding and irreligious existence.”²⁴ D. H. Lawrence’s novel *Sons and Lovers* (1913) caught this truth when Paul said to Miriam, “I reckon a crow is religious when it sails across the sky. But it only does it because it feels itself carried to where it’s going, not because it thinks it is being eternal.”²⁵ Dawson thought that the life of animal instinct was, in one sense,

²² Ibid., 228.

²³ Ibid., 230-231. Dawson quoted from the King James Version of the Old Testament, respectively: Psalm 42.7, Psalm 98.8, Judges 5.21, and Isaiah 66.12.

²⁴ ———, “The Dark Mirror,” 181.

²⁵ D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (New York: Random House/Modern Library, 1913), 294. In the 1930s Dawson grew a beard and resembled Lawrence in appearance. Of Lawrence, Dawson wrote: “To-day we are faced with the bankruptcy of rationalism and with the necessity of finding some principle of the religious order which can rescue us from the resultant confusion. One alternative is that of the late D. H. Lawrence, who accepts the failure of reason, and who seeks to find a basis for the religious consciousness not in spiritual intuition, but in that lower intuition of the senses and the physical life, the reality of which cannot be denied even by the rationalist.” He continued: “It is a true spiritual instinct which prompted Lawrence to revolt against the tyranny of ‘the white mind’ and to seek a deeper wisdom than that of the rational consciousness; but, owing to the denial and repression of true spiritual intuition, it has been deflected into a false cult of the primitive and the physical which can

better than that of human rational self-interest in that it was less limited; “for it serves not merely the purposes of the individual, but those of the species, and more, of the whole of nature.”²⁶ Human self-seeking could be “evil” (understood as disharmony with nature) in a way impossible for the other creatures of the natural world. However, strangely, for man to live a life of harmony with himself and with nature, he could not live simply according to natural instinct. Dawson described the truly *natural* life of man as that life lived according to the supernatural, as in St. Francis or the desert monks of the early church in whom simplicity, innocence, and ecological harmony seemed restored.²⁷

Dawson frequently linked religion and nature in his works both of scholarship²⁸ and of social criticism. If, for Dawson, man in disharmony with nature was to be in some way “irreligious,” so harmony with nature was a religious posture found throughout human history. In the ancient world “agriculture was not a sordid occupation; it was one of the supreme mysteries of life, and [the primitive man] surrounded it with religious rites because he believed that the fertility of the soil and the mystery of generation could only be ensured through the co-operation of higher powers. Primitive agriculture was, in fact, a kind of liturgy.”²⁹ Dawson brought his idea of religion-and-nature to bear in his social criticism of the modern world. For example: “The devastated areas of industrial England and the cancerous growth of the suburbs are not merely offensive to the aesthetic sense, they are symptoms of social disease and spiritual failure.”³⁰ Such a perspective grounded much of his critique of the modern idea of “progress” in *Progress and Religion* (1929).

Besides this proximity to nature, the household in which Dawson grew up maintained lively intellectual interests and a deep piety. In fact, his parents, Mary Bevan and Henry Dawson, were known as “book-worms” when they became engaged, and shared a strong Anglican faith. Dawson noted that his mother was “thoroughly Welsh by nature” and “an unusually learned woman.” She was devoted

afford no true solution of his problem.” See Christopher Dawson, *Christianity and the New Age* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1931), 50-52.

²⁶ Christopher Dawson, “The Nature and Destiny of Man,” in *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (by Christopher Dawson; London: Sheed & Ward, 1933), 321.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 341-342.

²⁸ ———, *The Age of the Gods: A Study in the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient East* (London: John Murray, 1928). See especially chapter V.

²⁹ Dawson, “The Dark Mirror,” 187.

³⁰ Christopher Dawson, “Catholicism and the Bourgeois Mind,” *Coloseum* II (1935). Republished in Christopher Dawson, *Dynamics of World History*, ed. by John J. Mulloy (1957; Wilmington: ISI Books, 2002): 211-223. The quotation is on p. 213 of this anthology.

to the Welsh country and country people and traditions, above all to the Welsh saints, on which subject she was an expert. Of his father, he wrote: "I do not think I have ever known anyone who had more catholic tastes, for he was equally interested in modern science and ancient philosophy, medieval mysticism and modern history, Victorian novels and classical poetry." He had special regard for Dante. Christopher remembered: "He always used Catholic books of devotion—Horstius, the *Spiritual Exercises*, Avrillon, Surin and the like. He abolished the traditional Victorian family prayers in favour of Terce and Compline which were said in English by the whole household at nine in the morning and ten at night."³¹

Dawson lived away from home between 1905 and 1908, occupied with tutors and travels in England and on the Continent. During those years he passed through an agnostic phase, losing faith in religion altogether.³² "The intellectual current" of the wider world, he reflected later, was "setting away from Christianity."³³ Dawson felt that pull.

However, he returned to the Christian faith by the time he went up to Oxford in 1908. There he read St. Augustine's *City of God* and was deeply affected by it.³⁴ "From the time that I was thirteen or fourteen," Dawson wrote, "I had come to know the lives of the Catholic saints and the writings of the mediæval Catholic mystics, and they made so strong an impression on my mind that I felt that there must be something lacking in any theory of life which left no room for these higher types of character and experience."³⁵ Dawson enjoyed a close relationship with his sister

³¹ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 19; Dawson, "Memories of a Victorian Childhood," 224, 236. Dawson referred to, respectively: (1) probably the obscure figure Jacob Merlo Horstius (1597-1644), author of *The Paradise of the Soul; containing a great variety of moving instructions and prayers* (originally in Latin); (2) probably the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola written between 1522 and 1524; (3) probably R. P. Avrillon, author of, for example, *Sentiments sur l'Amour de Dieu* (1737); and (4) Jean-Joseph Surin (1600-1665), a French Jesuit mystic, preacher, devotional writer, and exorcist famous for his participation in the exorcisms of Loudun in 1634 (recounted in Aldous Huxley's non-fiction book *The Devils of Loudun* published in 1952); Surin wrote, among other books, *Cantiques spirituels* (1660). Dawson also had a special regard for Dante. He referred to the Italian poet throughout his work and reviewed two books on Dante: Christopher Dawson, review of *Mediaeval Culture: An Introduction to Dante and His Times*, by Carl Vossler and *New Light on the Youth of Dante*, by Gertrude Leigh, *Criterion* IX (1930).

³² Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 37-39.

³³ Dawson, "Why I am a Catholic," 11.

³⁴ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 45; Bradley Birzer, *Sanctifying the World: The Augustinian Life and Mind of Christopher Dawson* (Front Royal, Virginia: Christendom, 2007).

³⁵ Dawson, "Why I am a Catholic."

Gwendoline³⁶ during his Oxford days and in his letters to her often discussed the topic of mysticism. He would ask her to send him certain papers on the topic from home; inform her that a certain “Miss Bell is coming to tea on Friday to talk Mysticism;” or abruptly conclude a letter with the lines: “I have discovered a delightful new English mystic. With much love, your affectionate brother, Christopher Dawson.”³⁷ In 1912, after departing from Oxford, Dawson worked as unpaid private secretary for the Conservative Member of Parliament Arthur Steel-Maitland (1876-1935) in London, but hated it. His only consolation was in “country walks and in the study of Huysmans’s mysticism.”³⁸ Dawson’s interest in both Christian and non-Christian mysticism continued into his adult life. During the 1910s and especially the 1920s a host of books appeared in France and Britain on Islamic mysticism. Dawson reviewed many of these in 1930 in which he drew attention to the close relationship between the great poets and the literary expression of spiritual experience among Moslem peoples such as the Persians, the Arabs, and the Turks.³⁹

The early twentieth century witnessed something of a revival of interest in mysticism. The feeling seems to have arisen among various Western scholars around 1900 that religion involved more than a system of ideas or Matthew Arnold’s “morality touched with emotion.”⁴⁰ In France, E. Récéjac’s *Essai sur les fondements de la connaissance mystique* appeared in 1897 and later influenced both William James and Rudolf Otto. In 1908 Henri Delacroix published *Études d’histoire et de psychologie du mysticisme*, which was later highly praised by Henri Bergson in his own book dealing at length with mysticism called *Les Deux sources de la morale et*

³⁶ Gwendoline Dawson, a very mystical woman, never married but became an Anglican missionary in Africa and worked in England supporting missionary causes (interview with Julian Scott, Christopher Dawson’s grandson, in London, 9 June 2009).

³⁷ Christopher to Gwendoline, respectively: (1) letter written from Cowley in 1915; (2) letter written from 96 Holywell, Oxford, 30 November (no year); and (3) letter written from Trinity College, Oxford, 5 November (no year). These letters are in the JSC.

³⁸ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 58. Joris Karl Huysmans (1848-1907), French novelist who published a great work of the decadent movement called *À rebours* (1884, trans. as *Against Nature*) which influenced Oscar Wilde; Huysmans was deeply interested in mysticism and monastic life throughout his conversion to Roman Catholicism in the late 1890s. Arthur Steel-Maitland (1876-1935) was then MP for Birmingham East. Scott recounted that Steel-Maitland was then interested in agricultural policy and that Dawson’s great-uncle, William Dawson, who took a keen interest in Christopher’s career, found the post for him. Christopher’s work was in the Research Department of the Conservative Central Office and consisted in looking up political cases to give a basis for questions in the House. See Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 57.

³⁹ Christopher Dawson, “Islamic Mysticism,” *Dublin Review* CLXXXVI (1930). Dawson’s article was highly praised in a response; see the review of “Islamic Mysticism”, *Sufi Quarterly* VI (1930): 62-65.

⁴⁰ Matthew Arnold, *God and the Bible* (1875; London: John Murray, 1906), 12.

de la religion (1932). In Germany, Max Weber took an interest in mysticism.⁴¹ In Belgium, the philosopher Joseph Maréchal published his two volume *Etudes sur la psychologie des mystiques* (1924, 1937), and in America, Quaker historian and religious writer Rufus M. Jones wrote on the subject in his 1909 *Studies in Mystical Religion*. In Dawson's own country, books by William R. Inge (1860-1954), Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), E. I. Watkin (1888-1981), Edward Cuthbert Butler (1858-1934), and David Knowles (1896-1974) appeared.⁴² "Nature mysticism" suffused the work of novelist and poet D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930), even as he mocked Miriam Leivers and her mother in *Sons and Lovers* (1913): "They were both brown-eyed, and inclined to be mystical, such women as treasure religion inside them, breathe it in their nostrils, and see the whole of life in a mist thereof."⁴³ But the first serious book on the subject in Britain (and still a classic) was Baron Friedrich von Hügel's two-volume work *The Mystical Element in Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends* (1908).

Friedrich von Hügel (1852-1925), one of the great philosophers and theologians of the early twentieth century, had a deep influence on young Dawson during his Oxford years (1908-1911).⁴⁴ Von Hügel was born in Florence. His father was an Austrian ambassador to Tuscany, which only ceased to exist as a Grand Duchy under the Austrian Empire in 1859 as Italy continued to unify. From age eight to fifteen, he lived in Brussels, and from 1876, London. He was fluent in Italian, German, French, and English. A devoted Roman Catholic, von Hügel co-founded the London Society for the Study of Religion in 1904 (which included as a member Arthur Balfour, Prime Minister between 1902 and 1905). Von Hügel developed many friendships, including with Protestant scholars such as Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), and played an important role in linking scholars in several fields in Germany, France, and England. His work in biblical criticism drew him into close association with Alfred Loisy and George

⁴¹ Christopher Adair-Totef, "Max Weber's Mysticism," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* XLIII (2002).

⁴² Dean Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (1899); Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (1911); Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic* (1918); E. I. Watkin, *The Philosophy of Mysticism* (1919); Edward Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism* (1922); and David Knowles, *The English Mystics* (1927).

⁴³ Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, 169.

⁴⁴ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 45. In a letter to his sister Gwendoline from 96 Holywell, Oxford, dated 17 November 1910, Dawson mentioned that a speaker from "the Pusey House is coming to read us a paper on von Hügel" (JSC).

Tyrrell, putting him at the center of the modernist controversy.⁴⁵ He received honorary degrees from St. Andrews (1919) and Oxford (1920). His influence in the sphere of religious thought was widely felt in Europe, and the Anglo-Catholic spiritual writer Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) was but one notable disciple.⁴⁶

Abbot Cuthbert Butler of Downside Abbey remembered that on their walks together he and von Hügel would stop to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament: “and there I would watch him sitting, the great deep eyes fixed on the Tabernacle, the whole being wrapt in an absorption of prayer, devotion, contemplation. Those who have not seen him so know only half the man.”⁴⁷ Von Hügel’s spirituality⁴⁸ was deeply incarnational, devoted to the church and science as sacred and secular means to spiritual purification and the growth of personality. Von Hügel cultivated an active interest in entomology, geology, biblical criticism, literature, history, philosophy, and the arts.⁴⁹

In the second chapter of volume one of *The Mystical Element of Religion*, von Hügel outlined his “Three Elements of Religion”: (1) religion as institution (external, authoritative, historical, traditional, communal), (2) religion as thought (question and argument, system, philosophy), and (3) religion as experience (intuition, feeling, the experimental and the mystical). Amidst his rigorous historical-critical examination of the life of the Italian mystic Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510), von Hügel concluded that none of these three elements of religion are ever found in the human person without a trace of the others. Institutionalism, intellectualism, and mysticism sometimes worked in harmony and sometimes toward the suppression of the other. Each element constantly supplemented, purified, and stimulated the other. The

⁴⁵ On the relationship of von Hügel to Tyrrell, Loisy, and modernism, see Lawrence F. Barmann, *Baron Friedrich von Hügel and the Modernist Crisis in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Lawrence F. Barmann, “The Modernist as Mystic,” in *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context*, ed. Darrell Jodock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Modernism attacked the intellectualism of scholastic theology and favored contemporary biblical criticism. It was condemned by Pope Pius X in his decree *Lamentabili* (1907) and his encyclical *Pascendi* (1907). In 1907 Tyrrell was excommunicated; Loisy was excommunicated in 1908. Von Hügel was not. Schoeck wrote that, “Doubtless this was due in large part to his social position and to the great respect in which he was held by so many scholars and notables outside the Roman Catholic church. Von Hügel, however, did not modify his views or his essential position.... He remained publicly faithful to free scientific and historical investigation, and staunchly loyal to friends who suffered under the ecclesiastical censures....” See entry by R. J. Schoeck, ODNB (accessed 7 Nov. 2008).

⁴⁶ Entry by R. J. Schoeck, ODNB (accessed 7 Nov. 2008).

⁴⁷ Abbot Butler, “Friedrich von Hügel,” *Tablet* 14 February 1925, 202.

⁴⁸ Joseph P. Whelan, *The Spirituality of Friedrich von Hügel* (London: Collins, 1971).

⁴⁹ James Luther Adams, “The Sacred and the Secular: Friedrich von Hügel,” in *The Prophethood of All Believers*, ed. George K. Beach (Boston: Beacon, 1986), 69.

“cross” of religious life meant the creative acceptance of those tensions.⁵⁰ Von Hügel’s whole personality worked to integrate all three elements of religion in his own life.

Such an understanding of religion was remarkable in a man whose two close friends had just been excommunicated by the institutional church as *The Mystical Element* appeared in print in 1908. Von Hügel, never excommunicated, maintained a delicate position between acknowledging contemporary efforts to rethink the faith, and the legitimate right of authority to determine what pertains to the Christian faith. In his opinion, the modernist movement failed not only because of clumsy church authority, but also because of failures within the movement itself.⁵¹ Remarkably, von Hügel maintained his love for the historical and institutional church. In a letter to his friend Norman Kemp Smith, he urged Smith to join a “clearly avowed and regularly practiced traditional, institutional, religion.” He noted that, “For myself such definite appurtenance has cost me much, all my life. Yet I am more than ever penetrated by the simply *immense* debt I owe (I mean, also just *qua* philosopher of religion) to such appurtenance.”⁵²

There is no direct link between his tripartite view of religion and Dawson’s later work. Nevertheless, von Hügel’s three elements of religion resembled Dawson’s own experience of religion in his youth as external (related to nature, historic architecture, and the rural society of Hay-on-Wye), intellectual (related to the study habits of his parents and his own interests), and internal (related to mysticism, family prayer). Furthermore, about one year after the appearance of von Hügel’s 1908 book, twenty-year-old Dawson wrote an unpublished, handwritten essay on mysticism. He wrote that, “From the earliest times there has been a tendency to use the word [mysticism] very loosely...it is now commonly used to describe anything that is obscure, mysterious or unreasonable....” Dawson himself thought that “it may not be impossible to describe what cannot be satisfactorily defined.... I think that it would be

⁵⁰ Baron Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, 2 vols. (1908; London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1961), I: 44, 51-53, 55, 59, 61, 82.

⁵¹ Barmann, *Baron Friedrich von Hügel and the Modernist Crisis in England*, 246, 247.

⁵² Von Hügel to Kemp Smith, 1 July 1919, SAA, MS. 30420/4. Emphasis was von Hügel’s. This letter can also be found in Lawrence F. Barmann, ed., *The Letters of Baron von Hügel and Professor Norman Kemp Smith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1981), 37. Norman Kemp Smith (1872-1958), philosopher, born in Dundee; from 1919-1945 he held the chair of logic and metaphysics at the University of Edinburgh; he was one of the greatest of Scottish philosophers of the twentieth century; 1924 elected Fellow of the British Academy; author of, for example, *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory of Knowledge* (1924); see entry by James A. Whyte, ODNB.

generally agreed that the province of mysticism is spiritual experience: all that the spirit can feel and know without the use of the senses and the reason is mystical....” He also wrote: “Mysticism is simply Natural Theology translated from the bare knowledge of the Reason, to the living experience of the Spirit and the Emotions.”⁵³ Surprisingly, this last sentence on the expansion of the concept “natural theology” would become the main theme of Dawson’s first set of Gifford Lectures thirty-eight years later.

His Oxford tutor, Ernest Barker, later compared Dawson “as being a man and a scholar of the same sort of quality as Acton and von Hügel.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, a copy of von Hügel’s *Mystical Element* is in Dawson’s personal library—linking the two men tangibly.⁵⁵ And, in a book review, Dawson specifically contrasted the positive perspective of *The Mystical Element* on religious experience with Ronald Knox’s more critical book *Enthusiasm* (1950).⁵⁶

As an adult, Dawson remained personally devout but little can be known directly about this intimate part of his life. Christina Scott wrote that, “It was above all in the mystical and transcendent elements of religion that he found the basis of his own personal faith, not only in these early days but throughout his long life.”⁵⁷ The Scriptures had played an important role in his conversion, and he contributed a poem, a “Prayer to St. Michael,” to the bulletin for the Sword of the Spirit movement (see chapter six) in 1942. The second stanza read:

Our armies are broken

⁵³ “On Mysticism,” DC, box 4, folder 9 “On Mysticism” (undated essay). Dawson’s biographer put the date of this essay at around 1909. See her discussion of this in Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 56.

⁵⁴ Ernest Barker, letter of recommendation backing Dawson for a position at Leeds University, quoted in *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵⁵ See “Collections” at <http://www.stthomas.edu/libraries> (accessed 12 December 2008).

⁵⁶ Christopher Dawson, “Religious Enthusiasm,” review of *Enthusiasm*, by Ronald Knox, *Month ns* V (1951). “Yet it would be hard to find two books written by men who shared the same religious beliefs which differ more widely in their attitude and their conclusions. For the element in religion [religious experience] which is the hero of von Hügel’s book has become the villain of Mgr. Knox’s, since he sees the appeal to inward spiritual experience, if not as the source of heresy, at least as the predisposing cause which underlies heretical and schismatic movements” (7).

⁵⁷ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 45. One can have a glimpse of Dawson’s mature religious sensibilities as an eighteen-year-old man in a letter to his sister from Baden, Germany: “The Catholic view of the matter [of free will and the Christian condition in this world], so I take it stands between the two heresies of Quietism & Nietzscheanism. Human love gives the best simile of this vie media. I do not love a Lover who yields himself to the Beloved like a piece of wax. Give me rather the strong lover, who while ready to sacrifice all to the beloved is no passive instrument, but a *real lover*. Self should not be destroyed, or merged in the All. It should be strengthened, enlarged & purified till it becomes *Christ like*. A friend trying to make himself noble & generous to repay his nobler friend, not (a Buddhist metaphor) a Drop returning to an Ocean” (21 June 1907, JSC).

The saints are dead.
 The prince of evil
 Lifts up his head.
 In the dark hour,
 In the deep night,
 Come down and help us,
 Where help is none.⁵⁸

Also, the saints figured prominently in Dawson's historical consciousness. He studied them in relation to the society of their time, emphasizing the relationship between religion and culture in their lives: "There has never been a stronger character or a man of more courageous temperament than Gregory [the Great]. Yet he shows a most profound pessimism in what he wrote. ... Yet it was just in this age, in the midst of the Lombard invasions, that the foundations of a new civilisation were being laid by St. Benedict in Italy and by Irish monks in the West. The Benedictine rule was the Church's answer to the problem of how to preserve the elements of Christian culture in a barbarous world."⁵⁹ Between 1949 and 1954 Dawson promoted a project under Sheed & Ward called *The Makers of Christendom* series which would relate the biographies of saints to their historical period. The project failed for lack of money, though Dawson's *The Mongol Mission* (1955) did appear. This was an account of Franciscan missionaries who traveled to Mongolia and China in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries which he edited. In notes for this series, he wrote that in the lives of the saints "we find such a rich tradition of authentic biographical material, which throws light on almost every aspect of life and thought over a period of nineteen hundred years."⁶⁰ To him, the saints were windows into their social worlds, outstanding exemplars of different kinds of Christian cultures of the past.

The Gifford Lectures

Dawson's early experience of religion was the background of much of his later work—especially his Gifford Lectures. In these lectures he wrote that, "All religion is based on the recognition of a superhuman Reality of which man is somehow

⁵⁸ STA, box 4, folder 95 "Prayer to St. Michael." See also: Ibid., 142-143.

⁵⁹ Christopher Dawson, "Christianity in a Barbarian World," in *Religion and World History: A Selection from the Works of Christopher Dawson*, ed. James Oliver and Christina Scott (Garden City: Image, 1972), 183. This selection was combined from "St. Augustine and His Age" (1930) and unpublished lectures at Harvard (1958-1962).

⁶⁰ STA, box 6, folder 30 "Christian Biography and History"

conscious and towards which he must in some way orientate his life.”⁶¹ Notice that this idea of religion linked the recognition of “superhuman Reality” *with human life*: Dawson rarely focused his writings theologically on religions as systems of beliefs. He also did not speculate explicitly and systematically as a philosopher of religion. Rather, he wrote from the perspective of history and the sociological imagination, concentrating his attention on the relationship between religion and culture, between those recognitions of superhuman reality throughout history and their corresponding thought-patterns, social-patterns, political-patterns. He did this most explicitly in his Gifford Lectures for the years 1947-1949. Even though he delivered these lectures after the Second World War and therefore outside the strict chronological bounds of this thesis, they can be usefully discussed in an interwar context. This is because it was during the interwar period that Dawson’s thinking on religion and culture matured, and when he engaged with the most important religious theorists (as described later in this chapter). Thus, his lectures can be considered products of interwar thought.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century scientific interest in religion increased dramatically. Religion came to be seen as an object of dispassionate study, apart from denominational disagreements. One sees this tendency in the foundation of the Gifford Lectures by the Scottish judge Lord Gifford (1820-1887) in his 1885 will. Gifford, son of an elder in the Scottish Secession Church, was persuaded that “nothing but good can result from free discussion.” Thus, he set up an £80,000 endowment to fund lectureships (open to the public) in the four ancient Scottish universities in Glasgow, Aberdeen, St. Andrews, and Edinburgh for the promotion of natural theology. By “natural theology” he meant the “knowledge of God” treated as a “strictly natural science...just as astronomy or chemistry is.” The lecturers could be of any denomination or no denomination at all, provided only that they be “reverent men, true thinkers, sincere lovers of and earnest inquirers after truth.”⁶²

⁶¹ Dawson, *Religion and Culture*. Elsewhere Dawson wrote: “Religion is the word generally used to describe man’s relation to divine or superhuman powers and the various organized systems of belief and worship in which these relations have been expressed. The belief in the existence of such relations is a general human conviction, common to all peoples and to all stages of culture....” Distinguishing between religion and magic can be difficult, but, “The essential criterion of religion is the attitude of worship.” Thus, “The primary elements of religion are the act of worship and the object of worship. From the interaction of these two factors there arise the organized systems of thought and behaviour which are known as religions.” See Dawson, “Religion,” 346.

⁶² Adam Gifford, extracts from his will, dated 21 August 1885, published in the *Edinburgh University Calendar, 1888-1889*, on pp. 493-497, at the University of Edinburgh, Special Collections,

The Gifford Lectures are one of the great British institutions, an “unparalleled exhibition of modern thinking about God.”⁶³ Since their inauguration in 1889, the lectures continue to connect Britain to the international world of scientific and religious thought today. During the past one-hundred-twenty years, the Gifford Lectures have drawn over two hundred lecturers, including even a former British Prime Minister in 1914 when Arthur Balfour spoke at Glasgow to enthusiastic audiences.⁶⁴ As of 2005, eight contributors have been Nobel Prize laureates.⁶⁵ Dawson was neither the only historian to give the lectures⁶⁶ nor the first Catholic.⁶⁷

According to the minutes of the Edinburgh Gifford Committee, Dawson’s name was considered for the Lectures as early as December 1938 for the period 1940-1941, along with others such as Jacques Maritain and Maurice Blondel.⁶⁸ Oscar Kraus, former professor of philosophy at the University of Prague, ended up receiving that nomination. Because of the Second World War, however, no candidate was chosen for the next several years. At a 4 February 1945 meeting the Committee agreed to inquire whether Arnold Toynbee would accept nomination for 1946-1948. “If Professor Toynbee should be unable to accept the invitation, it was agreed to approach Mr. Christopher Dawson with an inquiry in the same terms.”⁶⁹ Toynbee wrote to the Committee that he was willing to accept the nomination if he could present matter from one of his forthcoming volumes of his *Study of History*, to which he was already committed. The Committee decided that this did not meet the

Da36. Quotations are on 494-496. A complete list of the lecturers and the titles under which their lectures were published appears as an appendix in Larry Witham, *The Measure of God: Our Century-Long Struggle to Reconcile Science & Religion* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005). Lord Gifford’s will has been published in Stanley L. Jaki, *Lord Gifford and His Lectures: A Centenary Retrospect* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986), 66-76.

⁶³ Witham, *The Measure of God: Our Century-Long Struggle to Reconcile Science & Religion*, 5.

⁶⁴ These lectures were published as *Theism and Humanism* in 1915, a book that influenced C. S. Lewis’s return to Christianity—see the 2nd edition of this book published in 2000 by Inkling Books (Seattle, Washington) and edited by Michael W. Perry.

⁶⁵ Henri Bergson, Albert Schweitzer, Niels Bohr, Nathan Söderblom, Charles Sherrington, Werner Heisenberg, John Eccles, and Sydney Brenner.

⁶⁶ The others were: Albert Schweitzer (1934-1935), Arnold Toynbee (1952-1953), and Herbert Butterfield (1965-1967).

⁶⁷ Friedrich von Hügel was invited to the University of Edinburgh for the years 1924-1926 but could not deliver his lectures due to ill health. The French neo-scholastic philosopher and historian of philosophy Etienne Gilson (1884-1978) became the first Catholic to deliver the lectures when he spoke at Aberdeen from 1931-1932 (published as *L’Esprit de la philosophie médiévale* in 1932).

⁶⁸ Gifford Committee Minutes, 15 December 1938, E-UA, box “Gifford Committee 1894-1958” (DA 78), folder “Gifford Committee Minutes 1894-1948.”

⁶⁹ Gifford Committee Minutes, 4 February 1945, E-UA, box “Gifford Committee 1894-1958” (DA 78), folder “Gifford Committee Minutes 1894-1948.” Committee members present at the meeting were recorded as: “the Principal, Prof. Baillie, Kemp Smith, Godfrey Thomson, Calder Born, G. T. Thomson, Macmurray.”

requirements of the Gifford Trust, but it agreed to renew the invitation to him at a later date.⁷⁰ In this way, Dawson received a letter in March 1945 asking if he would accept nomination as Gifford Lecturer for 1946-1947.⁷¹

He accepted, but after working for a year he wrote a letter to John Baillie⁷² explaining why he could not, in the end, give the lectures at all:

I am sorry to say that my work for the Gifford Lectures has not been going well and I fear that I may not be able to deliver them. However I thought that it would be best to write to you personally before taking any steps to send in my resignation to the Committee. The fact is that for many years now I have been out of touch with philosophical studies and with the currents of philosophical thought and teaching in the universities, and I have found it far more difficult than I expected to recover contact. I find for example that the only book which deals *ex professo* with Natural Theology—Austin Farrer’s *Finite and Infinite*—is almost entirely incomprehensible to me, and...remote from my ways of thought.... I need not deny what a grievous disappointment this is to me, for there is no distinction I would value more than that of being a Gifford Lecturer, but under the circumstances I do not see any alternative but to resign.⁷³

However, Baillie wrote back to reassure Dawson that he was interpreting the “Natural Theology” of Lord Gifford’s will too conscientiously. Some of the best lectures had been historical rather than philosophical, so he agreed to postpone the lectures if necessary (to accommodate Dawson’s poor health) and pressed him for something in the field of the history of culture and ideas.⁷⁴ With renewed courage, Dawson set to work at his home just outside Oxford. An acquaintance there, the anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973), wrote to him in July 1946 saying, “I have been meaning to write to you for some time. I have, of course, long been acquainted with your

⁷⁰ Gifford Committee Minutes, 6 March 1945, E-UA, box “Gifford Committee 1894-1958” (DA 78), folder “Gifford Committee Minutes 1894-1948.”

⁷¹ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 152.

⁷² John Baillie (1886-1960), theologian and Church of Scotland minister; member of the Gifford Committee; born in the Free Church manse at Gairlock, Scotland; his father was a Free Church of Scotland minister; professor of divinity at the University of Edinburgh from 1934-1956; in 1952 he became one of the presidents of the World Council of Churches; his death precluded the delivery of his Gifford Lectures, but they were published as *The Sense of the Presence of God* (1962); earlier works included *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul* (1926) and *A Diary of Private Prayer* (1936) which sold tens of thousands of copies; John and his brother Donald Baillie (1887-1954) were among the distinguished Scottish theologians of the modern era; see the entry by George Newlands, ODNB (accessed 30 March 2009). Though Christina Scott reported that Dawson’s friend George Bell (1883-1958), the Bishop of Chichester, may have been the one to put Dawson’s name forward as a candidate to give the Gifford Lectures (see p. 152 of her biography), John Baillie could have been the one too. He was on the Gifford Committee and he likely met Dawson at the first meeting of the Moot (a discussion group organized by J. H. Oldham and discussed more in the next chapter) in April of 1938. Both Dawson’s and Baillie’s name appear on the attendance list for that meeting, as well the August of 1941 meeting (E-JHOP, box 12, folder 1.)

⁷³ Dawson to Baillie, 7 June 1946, E-JBP, section 1, box 17, folder 24. For an unknown reason several words and punctuation marks differ in this original, handwritten copy of the letter from that quoted in Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 153-154. Austin Farrer (1904-1968), English theologian and philosopher; fellow and chaplain of Trinity College, Oxford, 1935-1960; *Finite and Infinite* was published in 1943.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

writings.... Congratulations on your appointment to the Gifford Lectureship—a rare distinction. The subject of your lectures is one which interests me greatly.”⁷⁵

Dawson’s Gifford Lectures (1947-1949) consisted of two published volumes: *Religion and Culture* (series I, 1948) and *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (series II, 1950). *Religion and Culture* grew out of Dawson’s earlier work, especially *The Age of the Gods* (1928) and *Progress and Religion* (1929). The second series, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, drew from Dawson’s work in the early and mid 1930s in medieval history. It attempted to apply the argument of his first lecture series, *Religion and Culture*, to a particular historical development: “What I wish to do is to study the earlier phases of the Western development and to see how far the formation of the Western Europe culture complex was conditioned by religious factors.”⁷⁶ Lecture series II was a test-study of more theoretical perspectives about the relation between religion and culture developed in series I.

In the published version of series II, Dawson praised the Gifford Lectureship as giving him the opportunity to study the relation between religion and culture. He wrote of the dichotomy between the scientific historians on one hand and the students of Christianity focused on the history of dogma and ecclesiastical institutions on the other. The problem with such specialization and separation was that “the vital subject of the creative interaction of religion and culture in the life of Western society has been left out and almost forgotten.... It is only thanks to some exceptional foundation like that of the Gifford Lectures that it is possible to find an opportunity to bring [religion and culture] into relation with academic studies.”⁷⁷

The rest of this chapter will be an “internal” and “external” study of Dawson’s Gifford Lectures. The internal section immediately follows, which will examine various themes internal to the published texts of the lectures. This internal section will be broken down into responses to the following questions: (1) What kind of theory did Dawson advance? (2) What was the evidence he drew on? (3) With what method did he utilize his evidence? (4) How did he interpret the “natural theology” of Lord

⁷⁵ Evans-Pritchard to Dawson, 1 July 1946, STA, box 14, folder 125 “Evans-Pritchard, E. E.” E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973), professor of social anthropology and Oxford Fellow of All Souls College, 1946-1970; convert to Roman Catholicism, 1944; Dawson lived in Oxford during the mid 1940s and the men became friends—see Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 162. Evans-Pritchard conducted anthropological field work in Africa from 1926-1931 and then published his famous 1937 book *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*.

⁷⁶ Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (1950; New York: Doubleday/Image Books, 1991), 22-23.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

Gifford's will? (5) What idea of religion emerged from the texts? Following this, the external section seeks to answer the question: what was Dawson *doing* in his Gifford Lectures with his idea of religion? The answer will require a broad examination of factors external to these texts, such as (1) the questions in Dawson's mind concerning the position of religion in interwar British society, and (2) the theories of leading figures such as James and Durkheim that Dawson engaged in his Gifford Lectures and other works.

(1) *Kind of theory*. Dawson was not an original thinker in the sense of devising new theories. He did not reason-out ideas to their philosophical conclusions. Rather, he used them to make explicit the significance of unique, individual cultural phenomena. He also used general ideas to aid the construction of new syntheses. He could draw from multiple theories to form—as he saw them—more complete and balanced explanations of historical processes. This was his approach in the Gifford Lectures. He differed from those early twentieth-century theorists affected by evolution who looked for the *origin* of religion in an earlier stage of human development, as did Frazer, and Durkheim and Freud in their own ways. Evans-Pritchard critiqued this evolutionary mythology as it affected anthropology (and by implication, history as well) in his *Primitive Theories of Religion*. Why proceed from the less known (primitive religion) to the better-known (the higher religions) as a form of explanation? The reason was that those theorists who reasoned that way sought to “explain” religion by finding its origins, assuming that “what was simplest in structure must have been that from which more developed forms evolved.”⁷⁸ In the early twentieth century, few thinkers thought critically about this assumption because of the pervasiveness of evolutionism.

However, some did. In the text of his incomplete Gifford Lectures, Friedrich von Hügel wrote that, “Especially since the coming of evolutionary doctrines, many scholars, who undoubtedly have also helped on our further insight, write and speak as though we could and ought to gain our explanations from a sure and detailed history of the *origins* of whatsoever fact or insight we may be busy with.” He objected: “Now surely the right method is from the known to the unknown, and not from the unknown to the known.” Hence, von Hügel avoided what he called the genetic method in favor of the philosophical and analytic method—i.e., avoiding the search for historical

⁷⁸ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 1, 16.

origins by proceeding instead to explain religion from the enduring conditions (such as religious experience) of human life in the present.⁷⁹

Dawson combined both of these methods in his Gifford Lectures: he examined religion by looking to the past (historical method) to explain the social role of religion, while finding the origins of religion not simply in the past but in enduring psychological factors (religious experience) as did James. He avoided the whole question of finding the actual historical origin of religion, and focused on the function of religion in history: what had religion done?

He focused on function but rejected functionalist reductionism: “no study of religion can be fruitful unless it accepts the reality and the autonomy of religious knowledge. Any so-called science of comparative religion which treats its subject in terms of psychopathology or economic determinism is sterile and pseudo-scientific.”⁸⁰ Such a position, which found reductionist theories inadequate to explain the phenomenon of religion, was shared by James, Otto, and Weber in the early twentieth century (as demonstrated below), and by Evans-Pritchard, Mircea Eliade, and Clifford Geertz later in the century.⁸¹ Thus, Dawson held to a non-reductionist idea of religion which tried to explain the function of religion in relation to culture as mediated through individuals and institutions.

(2) *Evidence*. Dawson did not conduct original historical research or anthropological or archeological fieldwork. However, he did try to create an original synthesis and perspective on the vast amounts of available data. In *Religion and Culture*, Dawson drew from a host of sources, both primary texts and contemporary scholarly studies, in ancient history and anthropology. Ruth Benedict, Franz Boas, John Dewey, James Frazer, Sigmund Freud, William James, Carl Jung, Alfred Kroeber, Rudolf Otto, and E. E. Evans-Pritchard all appeared in the published version. One also finds fascinating discussions of diverse figures and cultures around the world such as Ibn Khaldun, Al Ghazali, the Mundaka Upanishad, the Pueblo culture of New Mexico, the Yoruba people of South Nigeria, Chuang Tzu and Lieh Tzu, and Cicero. Dawson often utilized texts from people and cultures such as these to illustrate, for example, the connection between the personal religious experience of

⁷⁹ Baron Friedrich von Hügel, *The Reality of God, and Religion and Agnosticism*, ed. Edmund G. Gardner (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1931), 27, 28.

⁸⁰ Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, 25.

⁸¹ Daniel L. Pals, *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xx-xxii, xxv.

the prophetic figure and the social order, or the relationship between kingship, social order, and the life of nature in the ancient world. Dawson explained the differences in the quality and status of his sources in lecture series two on Western religion:

In my previous series of lectures [*Religion and Culture*] I abstained as far as possible from dealing with the history of Christian culture, not because this lies outside the scope of the Gifford Lectures, but because it is the culture to which we all in some sense belong, and therefore it is impossible for us to study it in the same way as the cultures of the remote past which we can see only through the opaque medium of archaeology of the cultures of the non-European world which we have to understand from the outside and from a distance. This involves a difference in the quality of our knowledge which may almost be compared to the difference between the astronomer's knowledge of another planet and the geographer's knowledge of the earth on which we live. There is not only a far greater mass of material available for the study of Western culture than for that of any other; but our knowledge is also more intimate and internal.

...Consequently the study of Western religion and Western culture is difficult from the opposite reason to that which renders the study of prehistoric and ancient oriental religions difficult: because we know too much rather than too little....⁸²

(3) *Method*. Dawson used the comparative method in presenting historical and anthropological evidence from around the ancient world. However, by the 1940s this comparative method (widely used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) had fallen under a severe critique in the field of anthropology because it seem to abstract beliefs and customs away from the cultural whole whence they came.⁸³ The hope of a universal explanation of religion had been humbled by problems associated with the use of evidence gathered from around the world, so scholars increasingly pursued detailed field work on the culture of one particular people. For example, in *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (1937), E. E. Evans-Pritchard studied a particular culture in Africa without trying to explain religion as a whole.⁸⁴ However, some defended the comparative method in anthropology. One anthropologist argued in 1954 that, "A revival of the comparative method will eventually bring to good use the rich stores of observation that now gather dust in oblivion, and bring back some discipline of thought to a science that perhaps too often recently has shown an inclination toward impressionistic snap judgments for the sake of rapid 'applicability.'" He concluded: "In whatever form the comparative method may reappear, it will express the growing desire and need in cultural anthropology to

⁸² Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, 11, 12.

⁸³ This was Evans-Pritchard's critique of "armchair scholars" who used the scissors-and-paste method of compilation to wrench facts—from unreliable field reports, and with little sense of historical criticism—out of their contexts. Evans-Pritchard wryly commented that, "It is a remarkable fact that none of the anthropologists whose theories about primitive religion have been most influential had ever been near a primitive people." See Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, 6, 9-10.

⁸⁴ Pals, *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*, xxii-xxiv.

find regularities and common denominators behind the apparent diversity and uniqueness of cultural phenomena.”⁸⁵ That was Dawson’s hope.

(4) *Natural Theology*. The Gifford Lectures were founded for the purpose of “Promoting, Advancing, Teaching, and Diffusing the Study of Natural Theology,” or the “Knowledge of God.”⁸⁶ Lord Gifford presupposed the existence of a science of “natural theology” competent to study God and the relations between God, man, and the universe. This kind of natural theology rose to prominence in the eighteenth century in the Boyle Lectures,⁸⁷ for example, or William Paley’s landmark work *Natural Theology* (1802). These focused on the observable world of sunsets and landscapes and assumed that the scientific study of nature “might provide evidence for (or perhaps merely be consistent with) God’s existence and attributes.” This approach also assumed that human beings could be nonparticipatory observers of nature. As natural science rose to prominence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, God became an *object* of rational demonstration and apologetics the attempt to prove the truth of the Christian faith.⁸⁸

At the beginning of *Religion and Culture*, Dawson noted that this natural theology of the Enlightenment had lost nearly all attraction for the modern mind by the advance of scientific and mechanistic conceptions of nature. By 1900, Dawson wrote, the new science of comparative religion had everywhere taken the place of the old natural theology as the only recognized scientific approach to religious problems. “The Gifford Lectures are, I believe, the only foundation of that period of which the aims are still defined in the traditional terms of Natural Theology.” The natural theology of the Enlightenment, Dawson wrote, had followed the path of deism, while the later science of comparative religion tended to reduce its subject to a “museum of dead

⁸⁵ Erwin H. Ackerknecht, “On the Comparative Method in Anthropology,” in *Method and Perspective in Anthropology*, ed. Robert F. Spencer (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1954), 123, 124, 125.

⁸⁶ Adam Gifford, extracts from his will, dated 21 August 1885, published in the *Edinburgh University Calendar, 1888-1889*, on pp. 493-497, at the University of Edinburgh, Special Collections, Da36. Quotations are on 494-495.

⁸⁷ Robert Boyle (1627-1691), natural philosopher, chemist, physicist, theological writer; born in Ireland; famous for his “Boyle’s Law” published in 1662 which described the inversely proportional relationship between the absolute pressure and the volume of a gas if the temperature is kept constant within a closed system; he endowed the Boyle Lectures in his will as a forum where prominent academics could discuss the existence of God; the purpose of the lectures was to defend the Christian faith against non-Christian arguments, *without* descending to arguments among Christians themselves; see John J. Dahm, “Science and Apologetics in the Early Boyle Lectures,” *Church History* XIX (1970). The lectures ran intermittently from 1692-1905; in 2004 they were resurrected into an annual lecture.

⁸⁸ Alister E. McGrath, *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 126, 156, 233.

cults.” Both of these tendencies left aside the deepest problem of human consciousness. “This was the situation as William James saw it when he delivered his famous lectures at Edinburgh nearly fifty years ago. He sought a solution to the dilemma in a new existential study of religious phenomena in their experimental actuality.” Therefore, if the door of the old natural theology, the belief in a rational universe that manifests the power and intelligence of God, was closed, “the other way of spiritual experience is still open. Natural Theology says not only look up and look out—it also says look down and look in, and you will find the proofs of the reality of God in the depth of your own nature.”⁸⁹

The problem was that in the modern world religious experience lay on one side of a chasm and rational science and philosophy lay on the other. “The problem of religious thinkers throughout the ages has been to build a bridge between these two worlds.” Dawson argued that it had been the historic function of religion itself to build the bridge across this chasm. “It is the business of the historical science of religion to show how religion has fulfilled this task: how the vital relation has been maintained between the depths of the Unconscious and the surface of the social order: how religion asserts its internal spiritual autonomy and how it is moulded and conditioned by the influences of environment and social function.”⁹⁰ Dawson proposed just this historical agenda for his Gifford Lectures.

(5) *Dawson’s idea of religion: religious experience as a factor in human history.* In Dawson’s study of the historical relations between religion and culture an idea of religion emerged that privileged the factor of *religious experience*. In the majority of cases, from the Shaman to the Christian mystic, the natural basis of religious

⁸⁹ Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, 16, 18, 30, 31. Also responding to the limitations of the natural theology of the Enlightenment, Alister McGrath wrote recently that, “Natural theology...cannot be regarded as ‘proving’ God’s existence. Rather, it insists that the existence of a God such as that proposed by the Christian tradition makes sense of what may be observed of the world.” The natural world can never function as a “proof” of any worldview, religious or otherwise. Rather, for nature to disclose the transcendent it must be “seen” or “read” in certain specific ways—ways that are not necessarily mandated by nature itself. “Natural theology is fundamentally the specific human perception of nature that is enabled and elicited by the Christian theological vision. This act of tradition-informed ‘seeing’ cannot be limited to a rational explanation of what is observed, but extends beyond this to include its impact upon the human imagination and emotion.” See: McGrath, *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology*, 3, 233, 234, 312. Dawson, too, recognized the importance of *tradition*. The causes of the breakdown in the natural theology of the Enlightenment were religious rather than philosophical, he wrote. “The humanist Natural Theology [of Erasmus and More] had flourished as long as it was in contact with the living tradition of Christian culture. But as soon as Deism broke the vital contact and attempted to make Natural Theology the autonomous principle of a purely rational religion, it was powerless to withstand the disintegrating criticisms of the skeptics.” See: Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, 9.

⁹⁰ Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, 20, 22.

experience was the desire to transcend the limits of ordinary knowledge to attain a deeper level of consciousness. If religious experience is merely a form of sub-rational experience, then it can only be studied psychologically and no philosophical conclusions can be drawn, Dawson wrote. But if the deeper levels of consciousness viewed through religious experience are real forms of knowledge, “then they are susceptible of scientific treatment and there is room for a science of religious truth such as theology.” “Is it then possible to maintain that what is known in the West as mysticism is as much a part of Natural Theology as the belief in the moral law and the law of nature? If prayer is natural to man, there is no reason to reject the evidence that the movement of introversion and concentration by which the soul seeks the way to a transcendent absolute reality in its own depths is not peculiar to a single religion or a single cultural tradition but is a universal form of religious experience.” He surmised that, “The philosopher and the scientist may question the probative force of this experience. ...But the men of religious experience—the saints and the sages—have always taught that the further man penetrates into the depth of his consciousness and of what lies below his consciousness, the nearer he approaches to spiritual reality.”⁹¹

How had so-called “religious experience” related to other areas of human life in the past? Dawson never understood religious experience as a purely *sui generis* or personal phenomenon. He wrote elsewhere that “the life of the Saints is not as the eclectic student of mysticism believes, the independent achievement of a few highly gifted individuals, but the perfect manifestation of the supernatural life which exists in every individual Christian, the first fruits of that new humanity which it is the work of the Church to create.”⁹² Here Dawson linked the sources of Christian mysticism to the prior work of institution and training. The prophet, the purveyor of religious experience, was both the source of a new vision *and* the product of a prior cultural and religious tradition. Citing the revolutionary changes brought to pagan Arabia by Mohammad, Dawson wrote in *The Age of the Gods* (1928): “Thus the prophet and the religious reformer, in whom a new view of life—a new *revelation*—becomes explicit,

⁹¹ Ibid., 31, 34, 39, 190-191. John Calvin (1509-1564) identified two sources of a natural knowledge of God: the external ordering of the world and the internal “sense of divinity”; see McGrath, *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology*, 70, fn 41. He cites Paul Helm, “John Calvin, the *Sensus Divinitatis* and the Noetic Effects of Sin,” *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 43 (1998): 87-107. Dawson knew Calvin’s work and may have been influenced in this by him, though as already mentioned concerning his childhood essay on mysticism, Dawson sensed these two paths of natural theology from an early age.

⁹² Dawson, “Why I am a Catholic,” 11.

is perhaps the greatest of all agents of social change, even though he is himself the product of social causes and the vehicle of an ancient cultural tradition.”⁹³ Religious experience was necessarily interpreted through a prior social structure and education: “Civilization did not create the religious attitude or the essential nature of the religious experience, but it gave them new modes of expression and a new intellectual interpretation.”⁹⁴ Thus, for Dawson, religious experience could be an original and creative force, but it was always linked to prior social mores and intellectual systems for expression.

If one admits religious experiences as factors in history one must then “take account of their significance to the religious man who has in some sense assimilated them and related them to his way of life and his conception of reality.”⁹⁵ And here there was an immense body of evidence from which to draw, Dawson wrote, from all the great religious traditions. That evidence concerned the experience of transcendence which was associated with the movement of introversion. But the evidence also suggested that such experience was never simply individualistic. How was it linked with the social world?

(6) *Dawson’s idea of religion: Prophet, Priest, King and the sphere of culture.* No matter how universal and spiritual a religion may be, Dawson wrote, “it can never escape the necessity of becoming incarnated in culture and clothing itself in social institutions and traditions, if it is to exert a permanent influence on human life and behaviour.” Institutions always played an important role in Dawson’s historiography as the loci of interaction between ideas and beliefs and the society at large. In order to illustrate that interaction in the world religious traditions, Dawson wrote three chapters in *Religion and Culture* on what he called “The Sources of Religious Knowledge and the Religious Organs of Society.” These sources were the three—sometimes overlapping—social functions of Prophet, Priest, and King which Dawson had already briefly surveyed in chapter five of *Progress and Religion* (1929). These were models Dawson thought helpful in the scientific study of any historical religion.⁹⁶

⁹³ ———, *The Age of the Gods: A Study in the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient East*, xx.

⁹⁴ ———, “The Dark Mirror,” 187.

⁹⁵ ———, *Religion and Culture*, 32.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54, 66. Dawson would bring these types into his social criticism of interwar Europe. For example: “To the bourgeois politician the electorate is an accidental collection of voters; to the bourgeois industrialist his employees are an accidental collection of wage earners. The king and the

The prophetic type “covers the whole range of religious experience and spiritual achievement from the saint and the mystic through the visionary and the dreamer down to the medium and the diviner....” The prophet was the source of vision that could unite a society. He could be a messianic leader attempting to save his people in times of national disaster, like the brother of Tecumseh, the Shawnee prophet Tenskwatawa (1775-1836), Dawson wrote.⁹⁷ The typical excess of the prophetic type was individualism. That was usually balanced, however, by the weight of social tradition and the priesthood “which normally acts as the authoritative, regulating principle in religion and the institutional bond between religion and culture.” He continued: “Of all the social organs of religion the priesthood is that which has the most direct and enduring influence on culture. For priesthood represents religion embodied in a stable institution which forms an integral part of the structure of society and assumes a corporate responsibility for the religious life of the community.” The priesthood, as in Mesopotamia and Egypt, was the guardian of sacred tradition, sacred technique (ritual), and expert knowledge. In many instances, the priesthood and its temple operated at the heart of a society. With enough wealth, the temples possessed archives and schools and all the apparatus of scholarship. Hence, intellectualism was a characteristic of the priestly institution which distinguished it from the other typical sacred figures—the Prophet and the King. “The Prophet is the organ of divine inspiration, the King is the organ of sacred power, but the priest is the organ of

priest, on the other hand, were united to their people by a bond of organic solidarity. They were not individuals standing over against other individuals, but parts of a common social organism and representatives of a common spiritual order.” Christopher Dawson, “The Significance of Bolshevism,” in *Enquiries into Religion and Culture*, by Christopher Dawson (London: Sheed & Ward, 1933), 29.

⁹⁷ Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, 70, 71. On Tenskwatawa: “In the spring of 1805, a thirty-year-old Shawnee named Lalawethika (“the rattle”), an unattractive, one-eyed ne’er-do-well hitherto scorned as a braggart, drunkard, womanizer, and coward, fell into a stupor so profound that his family, believing him to be dead, began preparing his body for burial. But Lalawethika suddenly awakened, crying that he had been in the presence of the Master of Life, creator of the universe, who had given him a tour of heaven and hell. He had witnessed the torments of hell, where the wicked were repeatedly burned to ashes in houses of fire. The Master of Life, he claimed, had called upon him to show Indians the road to salvation. He now possessed not only the key to personal salvation in the afterlife but also a formula for Native-American communal renewal.” (Notice the linkage of personal with *communal* renewal in Lalawethika’s claims.) He took a new name: Tenskwatawa, “the open door that leads us to heaven.” This was the beginning of a new movement of Indian unification that led to the pan-Indian insurgency of 1811-1813 in the American mid-West and Upper Canada. See Alfred A. Cave, “The Shawnee Prophet, Tecumseh, and Tippecanoe: A Case Study of Historical Myth-Making,” *Journal of the Early Republic* XXII (2002): 640, 641, 643. During the Second World War, in a pamphlet for the Sword of the Spirit movement, Dawson wrote about Christian prophecy: “Since the day of Pentecost, the Spirit no longer confines His action to the inspiration of the individual prophet; He is, as it were, the common possession of the spiritual community, the Church, and every Christian has his share in the prophetic mission.” Christopher Dawson, *The Power of the Spirit* (Sword of the Spirit Pamphlet) (London: 1943), 4. (This obscure pamphlet is available at the British Library in London.)

knowledge—the master of sacred science.” Kingship was obviously the sort of institution existing primarily for a political function but which owed its social prestige to its religious and divine character. The king even came to be seen as a god or a son of a god in many cases. He was at once a god and a man, a priest and a king—a bridge between heaven and earth (e.g., an Egyptian pharaoh).⁹⁸

Dawson then wrote three chapters in *Religion and Culture* on the historical relationship between the idea of a “divine order” and (a) the order of nature (sacred science), (b) the order of society (sacred law), and (c) the order of the soul (the way of perfection inspired by religious experience). These chapters gave Dawson an opportunity to develop themes related to the social function of the prophetic, priestly, and kingly types. Dawson used these three “organizing ideas” of prophet, priest, and king to illustrate important ways that religion had related to culture in the past. He used them as social structures to express the complex relations between individuals and society. But they were not *just* ideas, organizing and synthesizing historical data, for real prophets, priests, and kings had inhabited the very past Dawson was trying to explain. Prophet, priest, and king were really *historical institutions* with sociological functions, mediating between religion and the common ways of life of the people.

Where did Dawson draw these ideas of prophet, priest, and king, from? The Judeo-Christian religious tradition might seem the obvious answer. The governments of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah were based on a system of Jewish kings, prophets, the legal authority of the court of the Sanhedrin, and the ritual authority of the priesthood. Christian writers drew from this Jewish tradition when writing about the threefold office, the *munus triplex*, of Christ as prophet, priest and king. This tradition descended from early figures such as Justin Martyr and Peter Chrysologus through Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, John Wesley and Karl Barth.⁹⁹ No reference to this

⁹⁸ Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, 84, 87, 89, 102, 109, 116. Elsewhere Dawson wrote of the priesthood: “Even the most anomalous and individualistic aspects of Shamanism [the prophetic type] acquire social significance when they are transferred to the hands of a priestly corporation. For example, the history of the Delphic oracle shows how the office of diviner, when administered by an able priesthood, may become of transcendent social importance for a whole civilization.” Further on: “there can be no doubt that the earliest forms of the higher civilization were characterized by the development of the priesthood as an organized social order.” See: Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 87-88, 91.

⁹⁹ Fred Guyette, “Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King: John Wesley and the Renewal of an Ancient Tradition,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* XL (2005). Dawson greatly admired John Henry Newman so he may have been influenced by Newman’s Preface to the third edition of *The Via Media* in which Newman wrote of Christ as “Prophet, Priest, and King,” corresponding to the three functions of Christianity. “Christianity, then, is at once a philosophy, a political power, and a religious rite: as a religion, it is Holy; as a philosophy, it is Apostolic; as a political power, it is imperial, that is, One and

tradition appeared in Dawson's Gifford Lectures, however. Alternatively, Dawson may have drawn these types from literary histories. Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* (1840) studied six classes of "Heroes" as illustrations of broader themes. These classes were the Hero as Divinity (Odin), Prophet (Mohammad), Poet (Dante, Shakespeare), Priest (Luther and Knox), Man of Letters (Johnson, Rousseau, Burns), and King (Cromwell, Napoleon). He used these types to illustrate the meanings of Heroism and "the divine relation (for I may well call it such) which in all times unites a Great Man to other men...."¹⁰⁰ There was also A. G. Gardiner's literary study of contemporary politicians and writers entitled *Prophets, Priests & Kings* (1908). Other possible sources were the sociological and anthropological works Dawson studied. Max Weber's *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (collected essays on the sociology of religion, originally published in 1920) studied priests and prophets as sociological types; Dawson may have known this work because he admired Weber. Furthermore, James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (single-volume edition, 1922) included a chapter called "Priestly Kings" in which he wrote that the union of royal title with priestly duty was common in the ancient world and "familiar to every one."¹⁰¹ This book was widely known, and Dawson was indeed influenced by Frazer, as demonstrated later.

(7) *Dawson's idea of religion: institutions and the sphere of culture.* Dawson's second series of Gifford Lectures, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (1950), was a very different book from the first series. He focused on the extent to which the formation of the European culture-complex had been conditioned specifically by the religious element. A central theme in *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* was

Catholic. As a religion, its special centre of action is pastor and flock; as a philosophy, the Schools; as a rule, the Papacy and its Curia." He continued: "The instrument of theology is reasoning; of worship, our emotional nature; of rule, command and coercion. Further, in man as he is, reasoning tends to rationalism; devotion to superstition and enthusiasm; and power to ambition and tyranny." Each of the offices "has its separate scope and direction; each has its own interests to promote and further; each has to find room for the claims of the other two; and each will find its own line of action influenced and modified by the others, nay, sometimes in a particular case the necessity of the others converted into a rule of duty for itself." See John Henry Newman, *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*, vol. I (1837; London: Longmans, Green, 1891), Preface to the 3rd ed., xl, xli.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841; London: Chapman & Hall, 1888), 2. Notice that Carlyle was not just interested in Great Men in themselves, but in the relation between them and other people. In this way, Carlyle was really writing a proto-social history: the Great Men "were the leaders of men...the modelers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain..." (1). This was also Dawson's point about the prophets, priests, and kings of old. He was trying to write a social and cultural history through these classes of outstanding figures in order to illustrate the theme not of Heroism but of religion and culture.

¹⁰¹ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (1922; New York: Macmillan, 1950), 10, 11.

the sociological place of institutions, especially that of monasticism, in the relation between religion and culture:

Any study of the origins of medieval culture must inevitably give an important place to the history of Western monasticism, since the monastery was the most typical cultural institution throughout the whole period that extends from the decline of classical civilization to the rise of the European universities in the twelfth century—upwards of seven hundred years. And it is even more important for the subject with which I am particularly concerned—the relation of religion and culture, for it was through monasticism that religion exercised a direct formative influence on the whole cultural development of these centuries.

No doubt, as I said in *Religion and Culture*, there have been other cultures—Tibet, Burma and Ceylon, for example, in which a non-Christian monasticism played a somewhat similar role.¹⁰²

Dawson wrote in his chapter “The Monks of the West” about the common economic-agrarian discipline of monasticism from Fondi in Italy to the Celtic world of the north. Monasticism sanctified work and poverty. Tilling the earth was seen as the foundation of stability amidst a world of war and social upheaval, a stability that was the basis of common religious life. Dawson quoted from John Henry Newman’s essay on the mission of St. Benedict to convey the relationship between religion and culture that he saw developing in the early medieval world. St. Benedict:

found the world, physical and social, in ruins, and his mission was to restore it in the way, not of science, but of nature, not as if setting about to do it, not in professing to do it by any set time or by any rare specific or by any series of strokes, but so quietly, patiently, gradually, that often, till the work was done, it was not known to be doing. It was a restoration, rather than a visitation, correction, or conversion. The new world which he helped to create was a growth rather than a structure. Silent men were observed about the country, or discovered in the forest, digging, clearing, and building; and other silent men, not seen, were sitting in the cold cloister, tiring their eyes, and keeping their attention on the stretch, while they painfully deciphered and copied and re-copied the manuscripts which they had saved. There was no one that “contended, or cried out,” or drew attention to what was going on; but by degrees the woody swamp became a hermitage, a religious house, a farm, an abbey, a village, a seminary, a school of learning, and a city.¹⁰³

Indeed, the simple monastic life often developed into a monastery that was a “vast complex of buildings, churches, workshops, store-houses, offices, schools and alms-houses, housing a whole population of dependants, workers and servants like the temple cities of antiquity.”¹⁰⁴

In this chapter on monasticism, Dawson used historical examples of monasteries, as at Iona, Lindisfarne, Lerins, Luxeuil, Fulda, St. Gall, Hersfeld, Tegernsee, and Lorsch, to sketch a generalized picture of the sociological function of monasteries.

¹⁰² Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, 44.

¹⁰³ John Henry Newman, “The Mission of St. Benedict,” in *Historical Sketches*, by John Henry Newman (London: Pickering, 1881), II: 410; Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, 53-54. Newman’s article originally appeared as “The Mission of the Benedictine Order” in *Atlantis* I (1858): 1-49; continued in II (1859): 1-43. For an unknown reason, Dawson’s quotation of this passage from Newman varied slightly from the originals.

¹⁰⁴ Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, 63.

They were essentially social and cooperative—disciplines of the common life at the nexus between religion and culture. As with Max Weber’s ideal or pure “types” (and unlike David Knowles’s purely historical approach in his 1940 work *The Monastic Order in England*), Dawson’s idea of monasticism as nexus may never have actually existed in its ideal form—no actual monastery may have ever possessed *all* of the characteristics and functions he described. However, the ideal “type” furnished a “conceptual framework into which all cases can be brought for analysis.”¹⁰⁵ In this way Weber wrote of the “pure type of the priesthood,” for example, as characterized sometimes by deep learning but more universally by the “specialization of a particular group of persons in the continuous operation of a cultic enterprise, permanently associated with particular norms, places and times, and related to specific social groups.”¹⁰⁶ So for Dawson: in his ideal-type of monasticism (or of prophet, priest, and king in *Religion and Culture*) he could compare monasteries across time and place in his effort to understand the sociological role of those institutions in the complex relationship between religion and culture. Indeed, Dawson privileged the historical study of institutions: “It was this motive [of spiritual and intellectual revival] which led Columba to Scotland and Columban to Burgundy and Boniface to Germany, and in each case the spiritual initiative of the individual became embodied in a corporate institution which in its turn became the centre of a new movement of transmission, like the movement from Iona to Lindisfarne and the creation of a new Christian culture in Northumbria....”¹⁰⁷ He called for a reorganization of Christian education to privilege the sociological and historical study of institutions in his later, post-Second World War writings.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 156. Pals contrasts Weber’s ideal-type with a scientific generalization: “An ideal-type is a general concept, but it is different from what is known as a generalization in natural science. Generalizations identify a single trait or characteristic common to a group, as when we say, ‘All kings have countries.’ A country to rule is a kind of bare minimum qualification for a king. When we create an ideal-type of a king, however, we form almost the very opposite of a generalization. We frame a sort of purposeful exaggeration, or maximum outline, of what a ruler should be, adding to the country he rules a large set of further attributes: royal birth, male gender, rule by ‘divine right,’ a queen, a palace with courtiers, a crown, nobles sworn to uphold it, and so on” (155-156). For Weber’s own account of the ideal-type, see Max Weber, “Objectivity in the Social Sciences and Social Policy,” in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences: A Reader*, ed. Maurice Natanson (New York: Random House, 1963). This essay originally appeared in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, XIX (1904): 22-87, as “Die ‘Objectivität’ sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis.”

¹⁰⁶ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (1922; Boston: Beacon, 1963), 30.

¹⁰⁷ Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, 19-20.

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Dawson, “The Institutional Forms of Christian Culture,” *Religion in Life* XXIV (1955); Christopher Dawson, *The Crisis of Western Education* (1961; Steubenville: Franciscan University of Steubenville, 1989).

Religion in Interwar Britain

Turning to an external, contextual study of Dawson's Gifford Lectures and his idea of religion, one of the problems motivating his work was the split between religion and culture that he observed in the modern world. He wrote toward the end of *Religion and Culture* that "we have a secularized scientific world culture which is a body without a soul; while on the other hand religion maintains its separate existence as a spirit without a body." Then: "We are faced with a spiritual conflict of the most acute kind, a sort of social schizophrenia which divides the soul of society between a non-moral will to power served by inhuman techniques and a religious faith and a moral idealism which have no power to influence human life."¹⁰⁹ Dawson—and others—perceived acutely a retreat of traditional religion from social life in Britain and the West.

There have been a number of different approaches by scholars to the study of religion in its relation to society and culture in interwar Britain. Adrian Hastings's *A History of English Christianity: 1920-1990* weaves together accounts of the Church of England, the Free Churches, and Roman Catholicism with the political, social, and intellectual developments of the time. Hastings concluded his assessment of the impact of the Great War on English religion by stating: "Christianity already appeared to have lost the intellectual battle well before the First World War began. What the war did was to shatter its social and political role as well: to unveil the truth to high and low alike of ecclesiastical near-irrelevance."¹¹⁰ In his chapter "The Intellectual Background" on the 1920s, he wrote that:

it is necessary to recognize that the principal intellectual (as distinct from social) orthodoxy of England in the 1920s was no longer Protestantism, nor was it Catholicism or any other form of Christianity. It was a confident agnosticism. ...The period of our consideration does not witness a slow crumbling intellectually of religious belief; rather does it start with an emphatic presupposition of disbelief, from which—if you were reasonably intelligent—only the clergy, Roman Catholics and a few eccentric neo-medievalists were expected to be exempt.¹¹¹

Stuart Mews shared the Hastings view in his "Religious Life between the Wars, 1920-1940." Despite a heightened sense of social responsibility after the Great War, ecclesiastical religion had increasingly less to do with life, as revealed in the General

¹⁰⁹ Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, 216, 217.

¹¹⁰ Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity: 1920-1990*, 3rd ed. (1986; London: SCM, 1991), 47-48.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 221.

Strike of 1926, the ruling on contraception at the Lambeth Conference of 1930, and the general sense of ecclesiastical inadequacy in front of war and mass unemployment.¹¹² The view that the churches were irrelevant to social questions by the 1920s was also argued from the perspective of social history by Jeffrey Cox.¹¹³

However, the activities of people such as John Reith, Dick Shepherd, and George Lansbury;¹¹⁴ events such as the coronations¹¹⁵ of 1937 (George VI) and 1953 (Elizabeth II); and the strands of Christian language in the public rhetoric of Conservative high politics (Stanley Baldwin, Lord Halifax, and even Winston Churchill in 1940),¹¹⁶ all suggested that Christianity was far from irrelevant to the self-understanding of public figures and of the nation. Indeed, Callum Brown has introduced a new interpretation of religion in Britain. His *Death of Christian Britain* (2001) is not an intellectual, religious, or social history. Rather, it is a cultural history seeking to understand how the British people in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century absorbed Christianity into their ways of life. His thesis is that Christianity penetrated deeply into their lives until the 1960s when a profound rupture occurred in the character of the nation and the people. From that decade, Christianity plummeted to the margins of social significance. It ceased to be the moral benchmark or the means by which men and women constructed their identities and their sense of self. Brown argues that while “Christian Britain” is dead today, this “death” did not happen in the interwar period. In this way he challenges the “secularization thesis” which argues that religious decline has been happening for centuries, that it is one of

¹¹² Stuart Mews, “Religious Life between the Wars, 1920-1940,” in *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present*, ed. Sheridan Gilley and W. J. Sheils (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 459, 460, 466.

¹¹³ Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 7-8, 209, 275.

¹¹⁴ John Reith (1889-1971), a Presbyterian and head of the BBC from 1923-1938. Dick Sheppard (1880-1937), dean of Canterbury; he was a chaplain during the Great War and the first to broadcast a religious service on the BBC in 1924 which brought national fame to his sermons; initiated the Peace Pledge Union (PPU) in 1934 and worked until his death for the cause of pacifism, by which time the PPU had over 100,000 members. George Lansbury (1859-1940), Christian socialist and leader of the Labour party from 1931-1935; president of the PPU 1937-1940.

¹¹⁵ See Dawson’s chapter on the “Coronation of an English King” in Christopher Dawson, *Beyond Politics* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1939). For him, the coronation was one of those rare occasions “when the old Christian order suddenly puts its head above the surface of life and claims a share of men’s attention for a passing moment” (97). He recognized that despite the secularization of English culture, a vague and diffused, but living and real, Christian tradition continued to exist in his day in England (97-99). Indeed, he wrote, “the secularization of European civilization is still incomplete. There is an inherited tradition of Christian thought and morals which has become weakened and dissipated, but which is still far from negligible” (110).

¹¹⁶ Philip Williamson, “Christian Conservatives and the Totalitarian Challenge, 1933-40,” *English Historical Review* CXV (2000).

the characteristics of the modern world caused by the advance of reason and industrialization. On the contrary, he argues, there were surges in British church membership between 1945 and 1958; this trend was in fact realized across the Western world. But the 1950s were not just different because of church membership; they were a different mental and moral and symbolic world.¹¹⁷ In this interpretation, the Britain of the first half of the twentieth century—when Dawson was active—was a deeply Christian country.

Nevertheless, Dawson saw his own society at the time as divorced from religion and interpreted this situation in terms of “crisis.” If he was the “most prolific interpreter” of the “Crisis of the West” in Britain,¹¹⁸ he was by no means the only one.¹¹⁹ His study of religion and culture occurred in this context of a perceived crisis in the relation between those two elements; thus an appropriate question is: what was Dawson trying to “do” with his idea of religion in relation to that crisis? How was Dawson positioning himself in the world of scholarship in relation to the leading religious theorists of the early twentieth century? How did he engage with figures such as James Frazer or Max Weber in his attempt to study the historical relations between religion and culture? An attempt to answer these questions will further illuminate Dawson’s Gifford Lectures and the ways he used religion to understand modern history in his other writings. This discussion will set the stage for Dawson’s thought on politics during the 1930s and 1940s in the final chapter of this thesis.

Christopher Dawson and the Religious Theorists

In the sphere of religious thought and theology the interwar period was one of excitement and important activity—though ultimately lacking in any consensus. The Christian and Jewish, post-Great War existentialism of Nicolas Berdyaev (1874-1948), Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), and Martin Buber (1878-1965) corresponded with currents in psychology and the study of mysticism to focus scholarly attention on subjective religious experience as a way forward in the study of religion. Others sought a new basis for religious philosophy in the “process” metaphysics of A. N.

¹¹⁷ Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularization 1800-2000*, 1, 2, 3, 5, 6.

¹¹⁸ Keith Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales: The Christian Church 1900-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 269.

¹¹⁹ Richard Overby, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009).

Whitehead (1861-1947) or in Thomism.¹²⁰ In Britain, spiritualism went through a revival during and after the Great War, as seen in the work of Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) and Oliver Joseph Lodge (1851-1940).¹²¹

All of this made religion a hot topic as Dawson thought deeply about it during the 1910s and 1920s before beginning to publish his books in 1928. Dawson was not an original theorist; he was not even a theorist at all. He was primarily an historian. However, the dynamic idea of religion present in his historiography reflected a highly original synthesis of the major trends in religious theory of the early twentieth century. For the purposes of this chapter, those traditions out of which Dawson drew are divided into two broad categories, each emphasizing fundamentally different approaches to religion: religion as an “individual” phenomenon and religion as a “social” phenomenon. Reductionist and anti-reductionist thinkers were found in both. The following wide-ranging foray into intellectual history necessarily leads far beyond Britain to consider the major religious theorist from Austria to the United States who Dawson referred to in his Gifford Lectures and other works.

The British-American tradition. The “British-American tradition” is a loose phrase applied for the purposes of this chapter to a collection of scholars from the English-speaking world, except for two important exceptions: the Moravian-born Sigmund Freud and the German Rudolf Otto, both of whom, nonetheless, have commanded wide audiences in the English-speaking world. These scholars of the British-American tradition shared a common approach to religion at a fundamental level. In several of their well-known and influential books, they wrote about religion primarily as a phenomenon of *individual* religious belief (Frazer), or religious experience (William James, John Dewey, and Rudolf Otto), or psychology (Freud). Alfred North Whitehead aptly summarized the perspective of the British-American school in his *Religion in the Making* (1926): “Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness.”¹²²

¹²⁰ S. W. Sykes, “Theology,” in *The Twentieth-Century Mind: History, Ideas, and Literature in Britain*, ed. C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 153-155, 157-159, 161, 167.

¹²¹ J. M. Winter, “Spiritualism and the First World War,” in *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society*, ed. R. W. Davis and R. J. Halmstadter (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹²² Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), 16. Furthermore: the primary religious virtue is personal sincerity, for “religion in its decay sinks back into sociability” (15, 23). “Collective enthusiasms, revivals, institutions, churches, rituals, bibles, codes of behaviour, are the trappings of religion, its passing forms. ...Religion is beyond all this” (17). On God: “This ideal

In America, the psychologist and philosopher William James¹²³ (1842-1910) published his *Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1902. This book became a key text for the study of religion in the twentieth century and an important influence on Dawson's focus on personal religious experience in *Religion and Culture*. The significance of James was that he applied his "radical empiricism"¹²⁴ to those people he called religious "geniuses" of "exalted emotional sensitivity" who witnessed in their writings to the "original experiences" which shape the "spiritual inwardness" of religion. He found the sources of his 1902 book in the "literature produced by articulate and fully self-conscious men, in works of piety and autobiography" throughout modern history. James defined religion as: "*the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine*" (James's emphasis). He specifically divided institutional religion and systematic theology on one side from "personal religion pure and simple" on the other. He did not want his readers to associate "religion" with "church," which—he thought—for many of them implied "hypocrisy and tyranny and meanness and tenacity of superstition" which justified their being "down" on religion altogether.¹²⁵ James did not want that. In fact, an important part of James' argument may very well have been to demonstrate the admissibility of belief against those who asserted that religion was a thing of the past.¹²⁶ In fact, James noted that the inability to believe may be intellectual in origin. Within such people:

Their religious faculties may be checked in their natural tendency to expand, by beliefs about the world that are inhibitive, the pessimistic and materialistic beliefs, for example, within which so many good souls, who in former times would have freely indulged their religious propensities, find themselves nowadays, as it were, frozen; or the agnostic vetoes upon faith as something weak and shameful, under which so many of us today lie cowering, afraid to use our instincts. In many persons such inhibitions are never overcome. To the end of their days

world of conceptual harmonization is merely a description of God himself. Thus the nature of God is the complete conceptual realization of the realm of ideal forms" (154).

¹²³ James was born in New York City into the family of Henry James sr., the Swedenborgian religious thinker; he was the brother of the novelist Henry James jr.; the whole James family was widely traveled; William James taught psychology and philosophy at Harvard University; his *Principles of Psychology* (1890) contained seeds of pragmatism and phenomenology and influenced generations of thinkers such as Edmund Husserl, Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

¹²⁴ William James, *The Will to Believe: And Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, 1896), vii-viii. "I say 'empiricism,' because it is contented to regard its most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience; and I say 'radical,' because it treats the doctrine of monism itself as an hypothesis..." (vii).

¹²⁵ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 4, 8, 31-32, 327-328.

¹²⁶ Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*, 42-43.

they refuse to believe, their personal energy never gets to its religious centre, and the latter remains inactive in perpetuity.¹²⁷

Despite the “naturalizing of mind” and arguments undermining religion after Charles Darwin (1809-1882),¹²⁸ James defined an immensely fruitful, empirical approach to the study of personal religious experience. However, Friedrich von Hügel criticized him in a letter in which he objected to James’s separation of religious experience from its “institutional-historical occasions and environment and from the analytic and speculative activity of the mind.”¹²⁹ Such a focus on the personal and the private in religion, in von Hügel’s opinion, led James to “abandon his inductive, concrete *a posteriori* method and to exhibit a reductive *a priori* conception that neglects corporate religious experience with its institutional influences, disciplines, and responsibilities.”¹³⁰

Nevertheless, James was a towering figure. His focus on personal experience was continued and transformed by American social philosopher John Dewey¹³¹ (1859-1952) in his *Common Faith* (1934). On the surface, it might appear that Dewey should

¹²⁷ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 201.

¹²⁸ Paul K. Conkin, *When All the Gods Trembled: Darwinism, Scopes, and American Intellectuals* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 43.

¹²⁹ Von Hügel to James, 10 May 1909. During the 1960s, the Unitarian theologian James Luther Adams discovered this letter in the Houghton Library at Harvard University. The letter had remained tucked for decades in a copy of von Hügel’s two-volume book *The Mystical Element of Religion* (1908) which he had autographed and sent to James. Besides his criticisms, von Hügel expressed substantial indebtedness to James’s famous work on mysticism, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. The letter and commentary are found in James Luther Adams, “Letter from Friedrich von Hügel to William James,” *Downside Review* XCVIII (1980). See p. 230 for the quotation.

¹³⁰ Adams, “The Sacred and the Secular: Friedrich von Hügel,” 69, fn 3; James Luther Adams, “Letter from Friedrich von Hügel to William James,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* XLV (1977): 497. Ernst Troeltsch, von Hügel’s friend, shared this criticism; see Adair-Toteff, “Max Weber’s Mysticism,” 340-341. The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor recently wrote a much-appreciative book on James, but his critique paralleled that of von Hügel. James’s rigorous and exclusive focus on personal religious experience failed to provide a basis for understanding collective religious life. Furthermore, Taylor questioned whether anyone can ever really have an “individual” religious experience because all experiences require a language of expression. And language is a gift from society to the individual. See Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*, 23-24, 26-28.

¹³¹ Dewey was born in Burlington, Vermont; his father was a grocer, and his mother was a devout member of the Congregational Church; she raised her children with strict morals as her husband was away serving in the Union army during the Civil War. Dewey graduated from the University of Vermont in 1879. He taught high school briefly, and then entered graduate studies in philosophy at Johns Hopkins University. He taught philosophy at the University of Michigan, University of Chicago, and then Columbia University. Through books such as *Democracy and Education* (1916) Dewey had a profound influence on educational theory. That influence was felt around the world: on his ninetieth birthday, programs of speeches on his importance were organized in Canada, Denmark, England, France, Holland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, and Turkey. See Henry T. Edmondson III, *John Dewey and the Decline of American Education* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006), 1. On Dewey and religion, see Steven C. Rockefeller, *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

be classed with the “social” category of religious theorists, for his goal was to outline the elements of a “common faith.” The individualistic sources of his religious thought quickly become clear, however. For Dewey, traditional religion had been made irrelevant by, on the one hand, scientific knowledge, and, on the other, its continued loss of social function. Dewey wanted to “start afresh,” to find out what religion would look like if “whatever is basically religious in experience had the opportunity to express itself free from all historic encumbrances.” The ideal elements within experience that can be called “religious” had to be freed from all creedal and institutional factors. For Dewey, unlike James, “religious experience” never contacted the supernatural because deeper levels of consciousness never obtained any real knowledge of it. Dawson criticized this view as expressed in the first part of Dewey’s Gifford Lectures (*The Quest for Certainty*, 1929) as “too superficial to explain so general and profound a tendency of human thought [the movement of introversion].”¹³² Dewey rejected the Calvinistic dualisms of his childhood New England. For him, religious experience was simply a sense of the whole, a kind of “natural piety” by which man saw his place as part of the whole of nature. Dewey’s idea of religion was the active pursuit of one’s ideal, whole self presented to the mind by the imagination and pursued despite obstacles and trials.¹³³ Natural piety liberated the individual from otherworldly concerns in his or her renewed efforts at social cooperation.¹³⁴

Dawson and Dewey recognized the same problem concerning the divorce of religion from culture. In 1934 Dewey wrote of this split as the “greatest revolution that has taken place in religions during the thousands of years that man has been upon earth.” “For, as I have said, this change has to do with the *social* place and function of religion. Even the hold of the supernatural upon the general mind has become more and more disassociated from the power of ecclesiastic organization—that is, of any particular form of communal organization.”¹³⁵ In 1931 Dawson wrote that, “To the English mind religion is essentially a private matter, a question of personal opinion.

¹³² Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, 35. When he began writing on education after the Second World War, Dawson heavily attacked Dewey’s own educational thought; see Christopher Dawson, *Medieval Essays* (1954; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 8; Christopher Dawson, *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture: A Way to the Renewal of Human Life* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 107-108.

¹³³ John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (1934; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 6, 9, 19, 25, 27, 31, 63, 65.

¹³⁴ P. Eddy Wilson, “Emerson and Dewey on Natural Piety,” *Journal of Religion* LXXV (1995): 343.

¹³⁵ Dewey, *A Common Faith*, 65.

Not only has it no business to interfere in political life, but it has no public character: there is no objective relation between the inner life of the individual and the public life of society.”¹³⁶ While Dawson turned to the past to investigate the historic relations between religion and culture, Dewey proposed a new, common faith. But this faith was based on a personal, experienced idealism shorn of all historical, institutional, and creedal content—as called for in the *Humanist Manifesto* of 1933, which Dewey signed.¹³⁷

In Britain, Sir James George Frazer (1854-1941), social anthropologist and classical scholar, was a convinced secularist like Dewey. Born in Glasgow, his father was a leading partner in a firm of chemists. All the Frazers were staunch members of the Free Church of Scotland. Frazer’s father did not want to send him to Oxford as a student for fear of the lingering aura of the Oxford Movement, so he sent him to Trinity College, Cambridge, “perhaps the single place in the kingdom most embodying the spirit of irreligion that his father feared.” Frazer quickly left his childhood faith. In 1908 he was named to the first chair of social anthropology in Britain at the University of Liverpool.¹³⁸

Frazer helped to establish the intellectual consensus of the early twentieth century concerning the reductive origins of religion along with other leading thinkers such as Sigmund Freud (religion derived from neurosis) and Émile Durkheim (religion derived from society). For Frazer, religion was derived from the human attempt to explain the world and control nature. His *Golden Bough* (single-volume edition, 1922) was, in England, “almost the bible of the 1920s: the book of religion par excellence.”¹³⁹ This fascinating book of comparative anthropology and mythology

¹³⁶ Schmitt, *The Necessity of Politics*, Dawson's Introduction, 10. Dawson continued: “But to a Catholic and a jurist like Professor Schmitt, the public and representative character of Catholicism is a proof of its truth and its universality. For religion is not to be identified with a particular element in life. It is the ordering of life as a whole—the moulding of social and historical reality into a living spiritual unity” (10).

¹³⁷ *Humanist Manifesto*, 1933 (<http://americanhumanist.org/about/manifesto1.html>), accessed 24 December 2008. This manifesto was the culmination of that non-theistic humanism which gathered strength in the United States through the 1920s; John Dewey was only peripherally associated with the movement. Leon Birkhead, Unitarian minister, originally proposed the idea of a summary statement of humanism. Roy Wood Sellars, professor of philosophy at the University of Michigan and author of such works as *Religion Coming of Age* (1928), wrote the first draft. See William F. Schulz, “Making the Manifesto,” *Religious Humanism* XVII (1983).

¹³⁸ See entry by Robert Ackerman, ODNB (accessed 7 Nov. 2008).

¹³⁹ Hastings, *A History of English Christianity: 1920-1990*, 223. *The Golden Bough*: 2 vols., 1890; 2nd edn, 3 vols., 1900; 3rd edn, 12 vols., 1907-1915 (Check in Edinburgh). Frazer abridged the whole work for his one-volume 1922 edition. Together, these editions sold in the tens of thousands of copies. Frazer thought of himself as a true servant of the facts; religion was a necessary stage in mental evolution but one based on false premises. Religion had been superseded by the new world view of the

had a huge influence, especially through literary figures such as T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence.¹⁴⁰ Frazer essentially created “primitive religion” as a subject of popular interest. Christianity appeared to sink into a jungle of irrational myths which had grown up throughout world history. C. S. Lewis left his childhood faith partly due to Frazer.¹⁴¹

Indeed, by the early twentieth century, “reductionism” claimed some of the most vigorous and celebrated intellects of the age.¹⁴² Explanations of religion like those of Freud, Durkheim, and Frazer tried to reduce the origin of religion to something other than that credited by the believer. “Reduction” in their case did not mean simply a form of explanation, a relating of two independent phenomena to a common category. In this latter sense, “reduction” is a cardinal principle of all science. However, Frazer and others pursued the more ambitious agenda of explaining an entire realm of data (religion) as belonging to another realm (psychology, society, mythology, etc.).¹⁴³ The simplicity of their universal explanations of religion in terms of something else undoubtedly contributed to their popular appeal.

If many people after Frazer assumed that to explain religion was to discredit it, Dawson sought to explain religion so as to credit it as central to human culture throughout history. In that task, Dawson was deeply affected by Frazer’s anthropological (rather than theological) approach to religion. “Among the most erudite and interesting” of studies designed to introduce common readers to the earliest sources of culture in the 1920s, writes John Vickery, “were Christopher Dawson’s *Age of the Gods* and *Progress and Religion*.” He continued:

sciences. While Frazer treated Christianity very subtly, in Robert Ackerman’s opinion, “In truth he was engaged all the while in a covert campaign against religion in general and Christianity in particular and may perhaps be seen, along with H. G. Wells, as the most important exponent of secularism in the twentieth century.” See entry by Robert Ackerman in the ODNB (accessed 7 November 2008).

¹⁴⁰ John B. Vickery, *The Literary Impact of The Golden Bough* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

¹⁴¹ Hastings, *A History of English Christianity: 1920-1990*, 236. However, G. K. Chesterton’s response to Frazer, *The Everlasting Man* (1926), helped bring Lewis back to Christianity; see Hastings, 237.

¹⁴² Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 149; Daniel L. Pals, “Reductionism and Belief: An Appraisal of Recent Attacks on the Doctrine of Irreducible Religion,” *Journal of Religion* LXVI (1986): 18.

¹⁴³ Daniel L. Pals, “Is Religion a *Sui Generis* Phenomenon?,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LV (1987): 261-262. The whole question of “reductionism” is a fascinating one still very much alive in contemporary debates; see also: Daniel L. Pals, “Explaining, Endorsing, and Reducing Religion: Some Clarifications,” in *Religion and Reductionism: Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion*, ed. Thomas A. Idinopulos and Edward A. Yonan (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994); Arvind Sharma, “What is Reductionism?,” in *Religion and Reductionism: Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion*, ed. Thomas A. Idinopulos and Edward A. Yonan (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

A historian of strong Roman Catholic convictions, Dawson analyzes and speculates on the relations between religion and culture. Though critical of some of the views of evolutionary anthropologists such as Frazer, he nevertheless is deeply indebted to *The Golden Bough* for many of his ideas. This is most clearly seen through his interest in the connections of primitive art and ritual, the importance of the individual for religious development, the religious significance of taboos on the priest-king, and the ritual drama as also an economic agricultural cycle.¹⁴⁴

This was undoubtedly true. Dawson was intrigued by Frazer, whose works appeared in the bibliographies of both books mentioned by Vickery. In a letter to Victor Branford at *The Sociological Review* Dawson wrote: “If you should want Frazer’s new book ‘The Worship of Nature’ reviewed, I would be delighted to do it.”¹⁴⁵ Dawson incorporated Frazer’s recognition of the importance of religious rites and ceremonies for the increase of knowledge and human progress. However, in *Progress and Religion* and his Gifford Lectures he criticized Frazer’s projection of modern rationalism back onto the primitive pattern (a criticism also made by Dawson’s contemporary, the analytic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who was also fascinated by Frazer’s book¹⁴⁶). Ritualism and magic did not arise from an early form of scientific positivism, Dawson argued, but from a primitive type of religious experience—“the ecstasy of the Shaman lies behind the stereotyped formulae of the magician, just as the religious experience of a Buddha or a Mohammad lies behind the developed ritualism of modern Buddhism and Islam.”¹⁴⁷

From Vienna, the psychologist Sigmund Freud¹⁴⁸ (1856-1939) reinforced the individualistic account of the human person and of religion. He is an exception to the “British-American” geographical designation for this tradition. However, there was a well-worn path of influence between Vienna and the English-speaking world in the

¹⁴⁴ Vickery, *The Literary Impact of The Golden Bough*, 102, 103.

¹⁴⁵ Dawson to Branford, 9 May (no year; the letter was written from Dawlish, Devon), KA-VB, folder “Branford Correspondence.” Frazer’s *The Worship of Nature* (1926) was given as his Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh 1923-1925. No review by Dawson has been found, but he was clearly interested in Frazer.

¹⁴⁶ Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 159-161.

¹⁴⁷ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 86-87; Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, 133.

¹⁴⁸ Freud was a chief mentor of the twentieth-century mind; born at Freiberg in Moravia to Jewish parents; lived most of his life in Vienna. Freud developed the method of psychoanalysis as a medical treatment of nervous disorders. However, he soon applied this method to trying to unlock all secrets of the nature and history of man. Freudianism won its place as a dominant idea during the interwar period, permeating everything from religion to pediatrics, from poetry to advertising. His major work appeared from 1900-1905, including *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *Psychology of Everyday Life* (1901), *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), and *Three Contributions of the Theory of Sex* (1905)—these four books were the foundation of Freudianism.

early twentieth century.¹⁴⁹ In Philip Rieff's interpretation, Freud's theories held a particular appeal for "persons living in an already highly individualistic and democratic culture, like the American." Freud's analytic psychological therapy, aimed at healing individuals *within themselves* was opposed to older "commitment therapy" which tried to heal individuals through *returning them to community*.¹⁵⁰ Dawson, too, had pointed out the individualistic foundations of Freudianism and criticized its ability to address social problems.¹⁵¹

Freud examined the psychological origins of religion via individual psychology. Even when he wrote about primitive religion, as in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Freud relied heavily on Frazer (also Durkheim) but approached the subject by assuming a similarity between primitive psychology and the neurotic psychology of individuals contemporary to his day. Freud inverted the true relation, Dawson asserted, for he derived the "sociological structure from a pre-existent psychological complex instead of *vice versa*."¹⁵² Rather than historical examples of religious experience (as in James), Freud thought that the study of neurotic psychology of the individual could unlock the secrets of the primitive origin and universal development of religion out of the sense of guilt associated with murder.¹⁵³ Freud's most direct writing on religion

¹⁴⁹ This happened through, for example, the dispersal of the Vienna Circle (a group central to the development of Logical Positivism) because of the rise of the Nazis during the 1930s, and through the dispersal of the Austrian (or Vienna) School of economics (e.g., Ludwig von Mises emigrated to the United States in 1940 and Friedrich Hayek was naturalized in Britain in 1938).

¹⁵⁰ Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006), 62.

¹⁵¹ Dawson wrote: "It is true that the psychologists themselves have had their own form of rationalism and materialism which has led them to concentrate their attention on a single aspect of the unconscious—the repression of the sexual impulses—and to neglect the rest. But this is easy enough to explain, since modern psychology began as a form of individual psychiatry and was not primarily concerned with the problems of society and culture. But it is impossible to understand these social problems in terms of the Freudian dualism between unconscious impulse and rational consciousness. Human life—and especially the life of man in the higher cultures—involves three different psychological levels. There is first the sub-rational life of unconscious instinct and impulse which plays such a large part in human life, especially the life of the masses. Secondly there is the level of conscious voluntary effort and rational activity which is the sphere of culture, *par excellence*. And finally there is the super-rational level of spiritual experience, which is the sphere not only of religion but of the highest creative forces of cultural achievement—the intuitions of the artist, the poet and the philosopher—and also of certain forms of scientific intuition which seem to transcend the sphere of rational calculation and research." See Dawson, *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture: A Way to the Renewal of Human Life*, 91-92.

¹⁵² Christopher Dawson, "Christianity and Sex," in *Enquiries into Religion and Culture*, by Christopher Dawson (1933; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 224. This essay first appeared in 1930 as a pamphlet published by Faber & Faber.

¹⁵³ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (1913), trans. A. A. Brill, in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Modern Library, 1938), 807, 918. In Freud's other book on ancient religion, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), he specifically justified his individual psychological method by an appeal to evolution: "The reader is now invited to take the step of supposing that something occurred in the life

was *The Future of an Illusion* (1927, trans. 1928). He specifically compared the development of humanity out of its early religious needs to the development of the individual person out of the neuroses and father-complexes of childhood. Religion involved both “obsessional restrictions” and a system of “wishful illusions.” Religious ideas “are not precipitates of experience or end results of thinking: they are illusions, fulfilments of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind.”¹⁵⁴

In 1942 Dawson noted the prevalence of Freud’s idea of religion as mass delusion, escapism, and an illusory substitute for reality. “If this were true,” Dawson wrote, “it would be useless to look to religion as a source of spiritual power; on the contrary, it would be a source of weakness, a kind of collective neurosis which perverts and saps social energy.” “But,” he continued, “is it possible to reconcile such a view with the facts of history? For religion has undoubtedly been one of the greatest motive powers in human history. It seems to have increased collective energy rather than diminishing it, and whenever humanity has been on the move, religion has been like the pillar of fire and the cloud that went before the Israelites in their desert journeyings.”¹⁵⁵ Freud’s analysis of religion was based on his analysis of individual (not social) psychology, and, like Dewey but unlike James, his theory excluded religious experience as a *sui generis* phenomenon. Dawson criticized Freud’s rationalism by contrasting it with James’s claim that the more deeply one peers into the hidden life of the psyche, the more disposed one becomes to recognizing the “reality and creativity of the spiritual forces which manifest themselves in the religious experience of the human race.”¹⁵⁶

of the human species similar to what occurs in the life of individuals: of supposing, that is, that here too events occurred of a sexually aggressive nature, which left behind them permanent consequences.... Since the emergence of the idea of evolution no longer leaves room for doubt that the human race has a prehistory, and since this is unknown—that is, forgotten—a conclusion of this kind almost carries the weight of a postulate.” See Pals, *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*, 94. Finally, in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), where Freud blamed religion for mass delusion, he revealed the same method of thought: “If the evolution of civilization has such a far-reaching similarity with the development of an individual, and if the same methods are employed in both, would not the diagnosis be justified that many systems of civilization—or epochs of it—possibly even the whole of humanity—have become *neurotic* under the pressure of the civilizing trends?” See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930; New York: Dover, 1994), 18, 69.

¹⁵⁴ Pals, *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*, 84, 85, 87. Freud’s empiricism: “But scientific work is the only road which can lead us to a knowledge of reality outside ourselves. It is once again merely an illusion to expect anything from intuition and introspection...” (85).

¹⁵⁵ Christopher Dawson, *The Judgment of the Nations* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1942), 127. Dawson cited *Civilization, War and Death: Selections from the Work of Sigmund Freud*, tr. John Richman (London: Hogarth, 1939), 34.

¹⁵⁶ Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, 18-19, 31.

Like William James, Rudolf Otto¹⁵⁷ (1869-1937), the German theologian and historian of religion, took keen interest in the unique character of religious experience in his book *Das Heilige* (1917, trans. 1923). Otto's book, *The Idea of the Holy*, born during the travail of the Great War and his own tenure in the Prussian Parliament, quickly passed through many editions and translations. It became a key text in twentieth-century religious theory because of its assertive defense of a distinctly religious experience and protest against the dominant reductionisms of the age.¹⁵⁸ Whereas James proceeded empirically to investigate religious experience, Otto developed a more categorical argument that drew from the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). He argued that there existed an irreducible category of "the holy" to which subjective feelings pointed through a kind of awareness.¹⁵⁹ By the "holy" Otto did not mean moral goodness, but something above and beyond the ordinary which he called the "numen." The numinous state of mind was perfectly sui generis and irreducible. It was an awareness of what Otto called the *mysterium tremendum*, which fascinates us but also shows itself to us as awfulness, majesty, and urgency or energy.¹⁶⁰ The primary fact in this religious experience of the *mysterium tremendum* was not the feeling but the encounter of the human mind with a Presence.

Despite Otto's explicit statement in the Foreword to the first English edition of his book that he sought in no way to promote any irrationalism, in his Translator's Preface to the second edition (1949) John W. Harvey found it necessary to defend Otto against misunderstanding. He wrote: "it is a complete error to suppose that Otto is mainly concerned to plead for, or indeed primarily interested in, the vindication of the emotional aspect of religion."¹⁶¹ For Otto himself, the study of the rational aspect of what is called "God" preceded his own study of religious experience. However, Otto wrote in *The Idea of the Holy* that, "The reader is invited to direct his mind to a moment of deeply-felt religious experience, as little as possible qualified by other forms of consciousness. Whoever cannot do this, whoever knows no such moments in

¹⁵⁷ Otto was born in Peine, near Hannover, Germany, into a prosperous family; wrote dissertations on Martin Luther and Immanuel Kant; Otto was a devout Protestant with wide religious sympathies, interest in Western and Eastern mysticism, and mastery of Sanskrit (the language of India's sacred texts). In 1917 he settled at the University of Marburg to teach theology.

¹⁵⁸ Pals, *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*, 207.

¹⁵⁹ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey, 2nd ed. (1923; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), Translator's Preface, xvi-xvii.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 13-23, 31.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, xv.

his experience, is requested to read no further....”¹⁶² Such a statement could easily appear to make religious experience not amenable to rational investigation. Indeed, Dawson seemed to criticize Otto on that very basis. In 1930 he wrote that, “recent German writers such as Otto, Heiler, and Karl Beth tend...to exaggerate the mystical and intuitive character of religious experience, whether in its primitive or advanced manifestations.”¹⁶³

One scholar has recently critiqued the James-Otto approach to religion because “thinkers of this tradition all locate ultimately significant contact with whatever is finally important to religion in the prereflective experiential depths of the self and regard the public or outer features of religion as expressive and evocative objectifications...of internal experience.”¹⁶⁴ Though Dawson was deeply influenced by the James-Otto non-reductive study of religious experience, this tradition was a limited one, as Dawson was well aware. It could not answer certain questions. For example, how can the objective, social nature of religion in history be accounted for? The British-American school tended to focus on the question of what religion *is*. The Continental school, however, was more effective in answering the question of what religion *does*.

Continental Tradition. Various continental religious theorists emphasized the connection between religion and society, most classically and powerfully in Karl Marx (and later Marxism). For Marx (1818-1883), religion was a symptom of a diseased society and the “*opium* of the people.”¹⁶⁵ For sociologist Émile Durkheim¹⁶⁶ (1858-1917), however, religion was not a disease but a natural phenomenon

¹⁶² Ibid., 8.

¹⁶³ Dawson, “The Dark Mirror,” 184-185. Lindbeck has more recently criticized Otto in the same way; see Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 21. Karl Beth (1872-1959), German historian of religion and Christian thinker; helped establish the Research Institute for Psychology of Religion in Vienna in 1922; fled to the United States at the outset of the Second World War; Dawson likely was referring to his *Frömmigkeit der Mystik und des Glaubens* (1927). Friedrich Heiler (1892-1967), German theologian and historian of religion; Dawson likely was referring to *Das Gebet* (1918), Heiler’s historical and phenomenological study of prayer.

¹⁶⁴ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 21.

¹⁶⁵ Karl Marx, *Toward a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law: Introduction* (1843), in Pals, *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*, 146. Though Marx lived in London from 1849 until his death, his intellectual formation was Continental. Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), architect of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, was also sharply opposed to religion as an agent of economic oppression—see his “Socialism and Religion” 28 *Novaya Zhizn* (3 December 1905), partly republished in Pals, *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*.

¹⁶⁶ Durkheim was born near Strasbourg, France, and was the descendent of a long line of rabbis; he was raised in a tightly knit Jewish community and taught by his teacher Fustel de Coulanges of the importance of religion in the formation of social institutions; taught at the University of Bordeaux and the Sorbonne; in 1898 he founded *L’Année sociologique*; Durkheim, along with Max Weber, is considered a founder of modern academic sociology.

intimately connected with the life of society. His classic work *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, appearing in 1912 and translated into English in 1915, developed the idea that society shapes all forms of human thought and behavior.

Durkheim recognized that in the early twentieth century many people aspired “towards a religion that would consist entirely of internal and subjective states and would be freely constructed by each of us.” This desire, loosely connected to the British-American views of religion already described, did not change the facts of history in the eyes of Durkheim: “wherever we observe religious life, its foundation is a defined group.” Indeed, “historically, we find no religion without a church [he used the word *église* to refer to any religious group or institution].” Even personal cults (e.g., of patron saints) were never entirely left in the hands of individuals. Religion “teaches the individual the identity of his personal gods, what their role is, how he must enter into relationship with them, and how he must honour them.” Durkheim defined it thus: “*a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions—beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church.*” The second element that takes its place in our definition is therefore no less essential than the first: demonstrating that the idea of religion is inseparable from the idea of a church suggests that religion must be something eminently collective” (Durkheim’s emphasis).¹⁶⁷

In this way, Durkheim opposed James’s definition of religion as essentially individual, though he agreed with James concerning the objective basis of religious experience: “this unanimous feeling of believers across time cannot be purely illusory.” Thus, “we allow that religious beliefs rest on a specific experience whose demonstrative value is, in a sense, not inferior to that of scientific experiments....” However, Durkheim departed from James when he held that the reality grounding religious experience did not conform to the idea that believers had of it (the transcendent). According to Durkheim, that reality “which is the objective, universal, and eternal cause of those *sui generis* sensations that make up the religious experience—is society.” Society developed moral forces, attached the worshiper to his cult, raised man above himself—indeed society made the man. Unlike the

¹⁶⁷ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (1912; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 43, 45, 46.

tendency of the British-American school, Durkheim did not think that the religious nature of the individual could be understood prior to society, just as ideas could not be understood prior to words and language. Religious experience was not independent of history; it was a product of social causes.¹⁶⁸

For Durkheim, the social power of religion shaped individuals. Dawson drew much from this sociological perspective on religion, though he was more influenced by Ernst Troeltsch¹⁶⁹ and the Boasian tradition of anthropology¹⁷⁰ than by Durkheim. Nevertheless, in a 1925 letter to his friend Alexander Farquharson of the Sociological Society Dawson wrote: “I have been reading Durkheim in my spare time. He seems to have much more affinity with our type of sociology than Hobhouse—perhaps owing to the common tradition of all the French schools.”¹⁷¹ In his *Progress and Religion* (1929) Dawson wrote that:

As Durkheim has said, religion is like the womb from which come all the germs of human civilization. “Since it has been made to embrace all of reality, the physical world as well as the moral one, the forces that move bodies as well as those that move minds have been conceived in a religious form. That is how the most diverse methods and practices, both those that make possible the continuation of the moral life (laws, morals and art) and those serving the material life (the material, technical and practical sciences) are directly or indirectly derived from religion.” “From the moment when men have an idea that there are internal

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 66, 79, 312, 313.

¹⁶⁹ Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), German theologian, historian, and sociologist; 1919-1921 member of the Prussian Landtag; friend of, and greatly admired by, Friedrich von Hügel; friend of Max Weber; author of, for example, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (1912, published as *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* in 1931), a book that appeared in the bibliography of Dawson’s *Making of Europe* (1932) and was highly praised (and used) in Dawson, *The Judgment of the Nations*, 40-41, 44. When asked who were the most important influences on his sociological ideas, Dawson would invariably reply, “Troeltsch and Le Play”; see Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 72. Troeltsch was not a scholar Dawson directly engaged with throughout his writings; the influence was one more of overall, general perspective. For example, in *The Social Teaching*, Troeltsch begins his historical and sociological study with questions posed about his present, about the social confusion of his present day and relations between the state and society. “What should be the attitude of the churches toward the modern social problem?” he asked—see Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. Olive Wyon, vol. I (1912; New York: Macmillan, 1931), 24. This *beginning* of study by posing questions about the present day was very much like Dawson’s approach. Troeltsch’s method in *The Social Teaching* was to examine the points of influence in the course of history between Christianity and the social order (family, economic life, politics, and intellectual life). Troeltsch’s fundamentally historical and sociological approach to Christian teaching was an essential component of Dawson’s own work.

¹⁷⁰ The works of Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie, Clark Wissler, and Ruth Benedict, who were all trained by the German-born “founder of American anthropology” Franz Boas, appeared in the notes and bibliographies of Dawson’s *Age of the Gods* (1928), *Progress and Religion* (1929), and *Religion and Culture* (1948). For a summary of the contribution of Boasian anthropology, see Mark W. Risjord, “Ethnography and Culture,” in *Philosophy of Anthropology and Sociology*, ed. Stephen P. Turner and Mark W. Risjord (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 2007).

¹⁷¹ Dawson to Farquharson, 12 January 1925, KA-AF, folder “Christopher Dawson Letters.”

connections between things science and philosophy become possible. Religion opened the way for them.”¹⁷²

If religious thought had, according to Durkheim, led human beings to scientific and philosophical thought, this was not because religion was nothing other than the divinization of the social consciousness, Dawson wrote. One cannot believe that this intellectual development was “a purely collective one in which the individual consciousness was entirely merged in that of the crowd. It is impossible to exclude the factor of individual thought and leadership from any stage of religious development. The influence of the exceptional man—we might even say of the genius—whether as organizer, teacher, or seer, is to be observed among savages no less than in advanced civilizations....” He continued: “On the contrary, though social life is dependent on religion, the sphere of religion is that which lies outside social control, and the primary religious instinct is that of dependence on superhuman powers.”¹⁷³ The problem with Durkheim was that he tried to derive the whole development of religion from a single principle (society). Durkheim, Dawson thought, revealed that “anti-metaphysical prejudice which has been so general during the last generation or two, and which rejects on *à priori* grounds any objective interpretation of religious experience.”¹⁷⁴ He had criticized Frazer and Freud on the same grounds.

In Dawson’s criticism of Durkheim, the Englishman’s fundamental program begins to come into view. Dawson was trying to study religion from the sociological point of view while avoiding mono-causal explanations of the origins and functions of religion. In that effort his work shared some common perspectives with that of the sociologist and cultural theorist Max Weber¹⁷⁵ (1864-1920). Weber’s work was complex. Dawson and he shared similar interests in world religions, the institution of

¹⁷² Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 69-70. Dawson cited: Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Eng. tr.), 223, 237, but he did not indicate which edition. The first British edition in English appeared in 1915 (London: George Allen & Unwin).

¹⁷³ Ibid., 66, 70.

¹⁷⁴ ———, “The Dark Mirror,” 183, 185.

¹⁷⁵ Weber was a brilliant man with a keen interest in many disciplines, comparative analysis, and conceptual generalization. He was raised in Berlin. His father was a lawyer and member of the German Parliament who frequently hosted leading scholars (such as Ernst Troeltsch) and government officials at the family home. Toward the end of his life he intended his classic *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* to be the first volume of eight on “The Economic Ethic of World Religions,” but he only finished three volumes before his early death: *The Religion of China* (1916), *The Religion of India* (1917), and *Ancient Judaism* (1919). Weber’s mother, Helene, was deeply religious (Calvinist) and had a strong social conscience for the hardships of the poor. She came from the Fallenstein and Souchay families, both of which had long and illustrious Huguenot lines. See Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*. Though Weber claimed in a 1909 letter to Ferdinand Tönnies that in religious matters he was “unmusical,” during the last decade of his life his interest in mysticism grew—and not only simply from the scholar’s point of view. See Adair-Totef, “Max Weber’s Mysticism.”

priesthood, the role of prophecy in human culture, and a methodical approach to the functional role of religion in relation to social life. Unlike Durkheim and Frazer, however, Weber did not privilege primitive religion as containing the seed from which all later religion grew. He thought that “at least as much (and indeed much more) can be learned from the actual histories of the great world religions as from the field studies of anthropologists centered on primitive tribes.”¹⁷⁶

Dawson appreciated Weber’s *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*,¹⁷⁷ but Weber was not often cited by Dawson, perhaps because Weber seems not to have been well known in general until many years after his death in 1920.¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Dawson greatly admired Weber’s sociological method. The sociologist, Dawson wrote, like the historian, should not use data from the past in order to justify political and religious opinions. The sociologist should seek “to understand the beliefs of the past as a means to understanding its history.” He continued: “For example, Max Weber, one of the first modern exponents of ‘a sociology that understands’ (*verstehende Soziologie*), has shown [in *The Protestant Ethic*] how the development of Capitalism is not to be explained as a purely economic process, but has its spiritual roots in a new religious attitude towards industry and saving that grew up in Protestant Europe after the Reformation. On the other hand, there are other phenomena which seem at first sight to be purely religious and yet have their basis in economic or social causes.”¹⁷⁹ In other words, religion for Weber could be an independent historical force.

¹⁷⁶ Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 183.

¹⁷⁷ First published in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, vols. XX and XXI, 1904-1905; republished 1920; first translated into English in 1930 as *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. For Dawson’s reference, see Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 159.

¹⁷⁸ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-1905; Meneola, New York: Dover, 2003), xiii. R. H. Tawney, in his *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926), was known as the “English face” of the Weber thesis.

¹⁷⁹ Christopher Dawson, “Sociology as a Science,” in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1956; Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002), 31. For more on *Verstehen*, the German word for “understanding,” see Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 153-155. The principle of *Verstehen* was that one cannot understand the actions of human beings as one understands happenings in nature. Behavior could not be explained only in terms of external causes, but internally held ideas and felt emotional states played roles as well. For Weber, “social values or beliefs acquire reality only insofar as they gain assent in the minds of individuals” (155). That corresponded to Dawson’s call for historical grounding in sociology: identify specific individuals or groups who were the actual “bearers” of a particular ideal. Descend to the concrete. This position diverged from that of Durkheim, who tended to think of society as an abstraction imposing duties from above on individuals. Weber was disposed to think of the community “as a mixed assemblage of individuals in which the many defer to the few, to those who by tradition, privilege, or personality claim the authority to lead them. They are the custodians of cultural values; they shape society as much as it shapes them and others” (155). That was very much Dawson’s position too.

Dawson appreciated the authentic historical mind he found in Weber, and shared his avoidance of mono-causal explanations of the social role of religion in history. Weber wrote: “The modern man is in general, even with the best will, unable to give religious ideas a significance for culture and national character which they deserve. But it is, of course, not my aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and of history.”¹⁸⁰ In order to explain human actions and institutions in history, one cannot resort to one kind of cause; causation can proceed in both directions. Weber’s method was multi-layered. He examined religion both as a social reality and as affected by the “charisma” and religious experience of individual prophet-figures such as Zoroaster, Jesus, or Muhammad. He examined the link between belief and action (e.g., the Protestant *ethic*), as well as the necessary institutionalization of a prophet’s original message if it were to survive.¹⁸¹ In this way, Weber shared an appreciation for the creative role, the “prophetic break” with the common mentality, the individual religious experience, associated with the British-American tradition of religious thought.

Dawson shared many interests and methods characteristic of the Continental tradition. His problem was to try to combine the non-reductive focus on individual religious experience in James and Otto with the sociological perspective of Durkheim and Weber. How could one account coherently for both personal and creative religious experience *and* the public, social power of religion throughout history—all without reducing one to the other or to something else? The attempt to answer that question was a major theme throughout all of Dawson’s historiography and his Gifford Lectures. He tried to reconcile religious experience and social function through focusing on religious institutions in the past, such as the temple or the monastery, as well as social types like the prophet, the priest, and the king as mediators between supernatural and natural/social elements of religion. How did this non-reductive sociological method affect his studies of modern history?

Dawson’s Idea of Religion and the Modern World

Dawson’s experience of religion as he emerged from his youth was at the same time *objective* and social (related to nature, historic architecture, and rural social

¹⁸⁰ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 183.

¹⁸¹ ———, *The Sociology of Religion*, 46-47; Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 167-168; Pals, *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*, 238-239.

structures), *inner* and personal (related to mysticism and family prayer), and *rational* and explanatory (related to study and a long tradition of rationality from Augustine to Dante, Newman, and von Hügel). Von Hügel's *Mystical Element in Religion* likely clarified intellectually for him this tripartite experience of religion. In his mature writings, however, he emphasized the *social* nature of religion much more than von Hügel had.¹⁸² His early experiences of these three elements of religion (above) coalesced into an idea of religion as *inherently linked to the permanent conditions of human nature and of human culture*. The way that link came about varied among different peoples and ages. Nevertheless, as Dawson showed, the link came about in history through the joining of the personal religious experience of the prophet or mystic with the functional and social roles of religion as mediated through institutions (such as monasteries) and types (such as priest and king). In this way he linked the non-reductive individual perspective found among some thinkers of the British-American tradition with the sociological perspective of the Continental tradition. This logic for studying the relation between religion and culture had to account for: (1) individual religion, (2) social religion, and (3) the ways of mediation between 1 and 2 and the wider culture. The tripartite idea of religion as inner, outer, and "bridge" emerged in modified form in Dawson's study of modern history.

In his chapter on the prophetic social function in *Religion and Culture*, Dawson wrote: "Nor is this prophetic element entirely absent from the modern revolutionary movement, in spite of its profoundly secular character. Rousseau himself is a remarkable example of the secularized prophetic type, and the leaders of the French Revolution, above all Robespierre and St. Just, were the Khalifas of this humanitarian Mahdi."¹⁸³ This intriguing comment suggests that, in Dawson's mind, the

¹⁸² Dawson did this not only through his attention to the Continental tradition of religious theorists, but also through his particular understanding of Christianity. Christianity, he wrote, was characterized by its belief in the creation of a new humanity. "This great central truth has been obscured and forgotten by the religious individualism of the last two or three centuries, which conceived salvation as a happy after-life to be attained by pious individuals as the reward of their moral perfection, or their religious practices. But the Christian idea of salvation is essentially social. It has its roots in the Old Testament, in the conception of the People of God, and the prophetic teaching of the spiritual restoration of Israel, and the progressive manifestation of the divine purpose in history." See: Dawson, *The Judgment of the Nations*, 130-131.

¹⁸³ ———, *Religion and Culture*, 82. "Khalif" or "caliph": title formerly given to Muslim religious or political leaders. "Mahdi": a leader who assumes the role of messiah, or "the Mahdi" for some Islamic believers will come in the future to rid the world of error, injustice, and tyranny. British people of Dawson's day probably thought of a specific person, "the Mahdi" or Mohammad Ahmed al Mahdi (1844-1885), who was a religious leader in Sudan who proclaimed himself the Mahdi. He raised an army and led a successful religious war to topple the Egyptian occupation of Sudan. When Ahmed's armies overran Khartoum they beheaded the British general Charles George Gordon in 1885. Ahmed

fundamental types of prophet, priest, and king could continue to exist together with some of their associated functions in a more secular form. In other words, Dawson's method of thinking about the relationship between religion and culture was not limited to the study of pre-modern societies.

If the Gifford Lectures reflected Dawson's thinking on religion in the ancient and medieval worlds, his book *The Gods of Revolution* studied the eighteenth century and the French Revolution and revealed his approach to modern history. This book appeared posthumously in 1972. However, there is evidence that much if not all of the book was actually written in the mid 1930s—hence its consideration in this thesis.¹⁸⁴ The incomplete bibliography reveals that Dawson intended to write an intellectual history. He preferred contemporary journals and memoirs, such as by the French journalist J. F. Mallet du Pan, who died in 1800, or the correspondence of the orator and statesman Mirabeau (1749-1791). He referenced the classic works by leading thinkers and later commentators such as Edmund Burke (1729-1797), Thomas Paine (1737-1809), Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821), and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834).

This book ostensibly discussed the French Revolution and key figures of the period, such as Voltaire (1694-1778) or John Wesley (1703-1791). Below the surface it sought to contribute to an understanding of modern revolutions in general as prime examples of Dawson's thesis concerning religion as a dynamic force in history.

died soon afterward and the movement lost momentum. Ahmed's army was destroyed by the British in 1898.

¹⁸⁴ In the 1972 acknowledgments, Dawson's daughter and literary executor wrote: "Last, but by no means least, I should like to thank Mr John J. Mulloy of Philadelphia for his valuable work in editing and collating the original manuscript some ten years ago when my father held the Stillman Professorship of Roman Catholic Studies at Harvard University." That places the composition of the book at least back to the period 1958-1962, though the bibliography of Dawson's publications at the back of Scott's biography proves that at least four chapters were already published in 1954-1956. However, Scott mentioned in her biography that Dawson "had started to write a book on the French Revolution, when at the beginning of 1936 he had a serious illness." See: Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 127. In a footnote she remarked that this was posthumously published as *The Gods of Revolution*. Thus, Dawson wrote some if not much of this book in the 1930s, though he made some changes later, for the last chapter mentioned the Second World War and Scott recorded: "In 1938 Frank Sheed was anxiously pressing Christopher to finish his book on the French Revolution but he was to be disappointed for by this time he [Dawson] had turned again to solving the problems of the day in a successor to *Religion and the Modern State* entitled *Beyond Politics...*" (131). Finally, *The Gods of Revolution* was to be originally entitled *The European Revolution*, as is found in the Dawson archive (DC box 3 folders 27-34). Manuscripts of eight chapters are here. Alas, there is no obvious date on these folders, but perhaps a careful reading of the manuscripts could help determine their date of composition and the extent to which these chapters were fitted into the final eleven chapters of *The Gods of Revolution*. However, the fact that the bibliography in the 1972 publication refers to no scholarship more recent than 1935 strongly suggest that the composition of the book took place during the 1930s.

Dawson's book investigated the religious roots of what he called the "European revolution"—the organic process of change in the modern world associated with the political, economic, and scientific revolutions from the eighteenth century to his day. Dawson specifically warned against a mono-causal explanation: "If, then, we would understand this process of change it is not enough to study it externally, as a series of technical innovations and consequent material changes. We must study it from within as a living historical process which is material, social and spiritual. And above all we must beware of the one-sided unitary conception which interprets the whole development in terms of a single factor."¹⁸⁵

The title immediately raises questions: the *gods* of revolution? Writing of the French Revolution in religious terms made sense to Dawson, not least because the Jacobins, he thought, had essentially tried to create their own natural religion, replacing the Cross by the "Tree of Liberty, the Grace of God by the Reason of Man, and Redemption by Revolution."¹⁸⁶ In a recent book, Dale Van Kley has also written of the Revolution in religious terms. He notes the close presence of religious figures at the outset of the Revolution as philosophes (e.g., the abbé Etienne Bonnet de Condillac), as relatives of lay philosophes (Diderot's younger brother was a priest, Condorcet's uncle was successively bishop of Lisieux and of Auzerre, etc.), and as activists. Among the latter, "the early Revolution owed some of its crucial successes to priests, most notably those who defected from the First Order in enough numbers to embolden the Third Estate to proclaim itself the National Assembly in June 1789. And the abbé Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, author of the most famous pamphlet of the whole Revolution, was a curate under the Bishop of Chartres."¹⁸⁷

In *The Gods of Revolution* the reader witnesses a fascinating interplay between the eighteenth-century Baroque institutions of church and state; the rational-critical movement personified in Voltaire on the one hand, and on the other the new scientific thought in England; and the religious forces submerged below the surface of Enlightenment high-culture in the world of the common people. Those religious

¹⁸⁵ Christopher Dawson, *The Gods of Revolution* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1972), 4. See also p. 146 where Dawson wrote that France was ripe in the late eighteenth century for great political and social change. However, "Conscious social and political revolutions, which we in modern Europe take for granted, are extraordinarily rare in history. They occur only when a civilization has lost its spiritual unity and is undergoing a process of internal transformation."

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁸⁷ Dale K. Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 5.

forces revealed themselves in, for example, the popular movements of religious experience such as the American Great Awakening of 1740, the highly individual poetic achievement of William Blake (1757-1827), and the renewed attention by the literary class to mysticism and medievalism which were the roots of the romantic movement.¹⁸⁸

The following quotation from *The Gods of Revolution* captures important characteristics of Dawson's idea of religion in his historiography of the modern world:

But in spite of its internal resources the Church, because of its close alliance with the state, was rendered exceptionally vulnerable to any attack from above. Consequently the substitution of the enlightened despotism of Joseph II and Choiseul and Charles III of Spain for the Catholic absolutism of the Baroque period deprived the Church of its traditional method of social action, and neutralized its activities for two generations. The situation was ripe for the rise of a new spiritual force which would fill the void created by the temporary breakdown of Catholic action, and give an outlet to the religious instinct that found no satisfaction in the rational culture of the Enlightenment. For the Enlightenment had swept and garnished the western mind without bringing anything to take the place of the religion that it had destroyed. The typical man of the age, like Voltaire or Frederick the Great or Horace Walpole, was the final product of an aristocratic humanist culture. He had all the gifts that a purely intellectual culture would bestow, but the hard polished surface of his mind reflected light without warmth. If the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment were to penetrate beyond the limited world of the privileged classes and change the thought and the life of the people, they had to make an appeal to psychological forces that lay beneath the surface of rational consciousness. They had to be transformed from a philosophy into a religion: to cease to be mere ideas and to become articles of faith.

This reinterpretation of liberalism in religious terms was the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who thus became the founder and prophet of a new faith—the religion of democracy. The son of a watchmaker of Geneva, *déclassé et déraciné*, he came into the world of the salons from the borders of that religious underworld which the philosophers had despised or ignored. ...In 1749, as he walked to Vincennes on a hot autumn afternoon to visit Diderot, he experienced a sudden flash of inspiration which revealed to him his true mission and converted him from an unsuccessful man of letters into the prophet of a new gospel. He saw that all the ills of man and all the evils of society were due not to man's own sin or ignorance but to social injustice and the corruptions of an artificial civilization. If man could return to nature and follow the divinely inspired instincts of his own heart, all would be well.

...Voltaire gnashed his teeth in rage at the daring of this madman and charlatan [Rousseau] who was a traitor to the philosophic cause and who divided the forces of progress. For it was no longer to Voltaire but to Rousseau that the new generation turned for guidance and inspiration. He was the spiritual father of the makers of the new age, and the source of that spirit of revolutionary idealism which finds expression not only in liberalism but in socialism and anarchism as well.¹⁸⁹

This lengthy passage presents a snap-shot of the method of thought below the surface of Dawson's historiography. It reveals some of his key words and phrases: "social," "action," "a new spiritual force," "religious instinct," "flash of inspiration," "prophet," and "intellectual culture." Dawson pitted the forces of church and state (institutions), the Enlightenment (a rational movement), and Rousseouian

¹⁸⁸ Dawson, *The Gods of Revolution*, 41, 140, 144.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 34-36.

experientialism each against the other in this narrative. The reader observes how he handled each element and tried to draw out the relations between them. That was the way he sought to explain the relationship between religion/ideas and culture—as a constant dynamism and tension of *experience*, *reason*, and *institutions* molding and being molded by larger social forces. These three elements, reminiscent of von Hügel’s tripartite idea of religion in *Mystical Element* discussed earlier, were for Dawson always embodied in actual historical religious and secular characters. And they were in continuous flux—now there was a separation of them, then a coalition of two against another, then a resurrection of that other in a constant cycle of movement between individuals and society and back again in which no one element could establish a complete hegemony.¹⁹⁰

In the first paragraph of the extended quotation (above) from *The Gods of Revolution* Dawson juxtaposed the institutional church and the rationalism of the Enlightenment age with the corresponding vacuum of religious need that Rousseau stepped into. In Dawson’s interpretation, Rousseau himself felt the psychological weakness of rationalism. He passed through a vivid personal experience—a “religious” experience because it changed his whole perspective on the meaning of his life. That experience, Rousseau’s “social mysticism,”¹⁹¹ was “institutionalized” by his books such as *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750), *Émile* (1762), and others on religion, marriage and family, education, and politics. This “institutionalization” in turn inspired a new generation as with a new faith in pure democracy and the “spiritual community.” That new generation included the Jacobins, the followers of Robespierre and St. Just, of Billaud-Varennes and Collot d’Herbois—the men, in Dawson’s interpretation, “who ruled France with such terrible energy and ruthless determination that the single year of their power changed the whole course of European history.”¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ For example, in Dawson’s view, a movement of suppression of one social force by another was seen in the victory of classicism at the end of the seventeenth century, which was “intimately connected with the defeat of mysticism and was followed by what Henri Brémond, in his great work on the history of religious sentiment in France, calls ‘la retraite des mystiques’”. Throughout the eighteenth century mysticism was exiled from the world of higher culture, and the religion of society became more and more arid and rationalistic. See *Ibid.*, 140. In his notes on a paper by the sociologist Karl Mannheim for the Moot, a discussion group Dawson was involved with from 1938-1941, he wrote of a “vital rhythm,” a religious movement present in every age involving the “contrast of the Law and the Prophets, the religion of authority and the religion of the Spirit, Institutionalism and Mysticism, the Apolline and Dionysian.” See: “Notes on Mannheim’s Paper,” E-JHOP, box 14, folder 4.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁹² ———, *Beyond Politics*, 71-72.

Again in the quotation from *The Gods of Revolution*, one sees that spiritual forces were not monopolized by Catholicism in Dawson's interpretation. "The situation was ripe for the rise of a new spiritual force which would fill the void created by the temporary breakdown of Catholic action." Spiritual and religious forces ran more deeply through human life than could be monopolized by any one institution at that time (such as the Catholic Church). The rationalists irrationally identified religion with Christianity and underestimated the come-back force religion possesses in order to find other channels of expression. For Dawson, religion possessed such "come-back force" because it originated in the permanent conditions of human nature—in a "religious sense"¹⁹³ (though he did not use that phrase). On the basis of spiritual consciousness and in response to the needs inherent in their nature, human beings built up systems of religion.¹⁹⁴ Even if they destroyed those systems in the name of secular ideals, Dawson thought, the religious needs of human beings remained, manifesting themselves in the pseudo-religious ideologies of the twentieth century, for example—a theme investigated in the next chapter.

Finally, Dawson's dynamic conception of religion-and-culture allowed him sometimes to anticipate the next historical development. For example, in the quotation from *The Gods of Revolution* he described the liberal ideals of the Enlightenment

¹⁹³ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (1958; Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997). As early as 1916 Dawson thought of religion as related to the intrinsic needs of the human soul: "However strong a society may be, the needs of the individual soul exist, and all Nature, much less a great material civilisation, is incapable of satisfying them." Christopher Dawson, "The Catholic Tradition and the Modern State," *Catholic Review* 1916, 35.

¹⁹⁴ Dawson wrote: "A religion which remains on the rational level and denies the possibility of any real relation with a higher order of spiritual reality fails in its most essential function and, ultimately, like Deism, ceases to be a religion at all." "We shall never create a living religion merely as a means to an end, a way out of our practical difficulties. For the religious view of life is the opposite to the utilitarian. It regards the world and human life *sub specie aeternitatis*. It is only by accepting the religious point of view, by regarding religion as an end in itself and not as a means to something else, that we can discuss religious problems profitably. It may be said that this point of view belongs to the past, and that we cannot return to it. But neither can we escape from it. The past is simply the record of the experience of humanity, and if that experience testifies to the existence of a permanent human need, that need must manifest itself in the future no less than in the past. What, then, is man's essential religious need, judging by the experience of the past? There is an extraordinary degree of unanimity in the response, although, of course, it is not complete. One answer is God, the supernatural, the transcendent; the other answer is deliverance, salvation, eternal life. And both these two elements are represented in some form or other in any given religion" ("The Dark Mirror," 178-179, 189-190). Some may argue that "Science" solves these questions, but Dawson wrote that, "We have returned to the old problems which arise not from lack of scientific knowledge, but from the very conditions of our nature" ("The Nature and Destiny of Man," 323). What are those questions and conditions? How is man "to escape from this wheel to which he is bound by the accumulated weight of his own acts and desires? How is he to bring his life into vital relation with that spiritual reality of which he is but dimly conscious and which transcends all the categories of his thought and the conditions of human experience? This is the fundamental religious problem which has perplexed and baffled the mind of man from the beginning, and is, in a sense, inherent in his nature" ("The Dark Mirror," 181-182).

which “had to be transformed from a philosophy into a religion: to cease to be mere ideas and to become articles of faith.” “Had” to be? Why *had* to be? Because, Dawson might answer, such is the nature of the human person: rational ideals cannot remain disconnected from experience and belief. Experience and belief move man to action, and propel him in a direction. The ideals of the Enlightenment had to be given an emotional and experiential basis for their full social potential to be realized. Rousseau provided that impetus.

It was this connection of religion to the motive forces of the human person which made it the “key of history” for Dawson. He attributed this quotation to Lord Acton.¹⁹⁵ However, he did not give a reference and so it appears that he was paraphrasing a letter Acton wrote to Mary Gladstone, which Dawson possibly read after its publication in 1904.¹⁹⁶ Acton wrote that, “All understanding of history depends on one’s understanding the forces that make it, of which religious forces are the most active, and the most definite. We cannot follow all the variations of a human mind, but when we know the religious motive, that a man was an Anabaptist, an Arminian, a Deist or a Jansenist, we have the master key, we stand on known ground, we are working a sum that has been, at least partially, worked out for us, we follow a computed course, and get rid of guesses and accidents.”¹⁹⁷ Thomas Carlyle enunciated this point even before Acton:

It is well said, in every sense, that a man’s religion is the chief fact with regard to him. A man’s, or a nation of men’s. By religion I do not mean here the church-creed which he professes, the articles of faith which he will sign and, in words or otherwise, assert; not this wholly, in many cases not this at all. ...But the thing a man does practically believe (and this is often enough *without* asserting it even to himself, much less to others); the thing a man does practically lay to heart, and know for certain, concerning his vital relations to this mysterious Universe, and his duty and destiny there, that is in all cases the primary thing for him, and creatively determines all the rest. That is his *religion*; or, it may be, his mere skepticism and *no-religion*: the manner it is in which he feels himself to be spiritually related to the Unseen World or No-World; and I say, if you tell me what that is, you tell me to a very great extent what the man is, what the kind of things he will do is. Of a man or of a nation we inquire, therefore, first of all, What religion they had? ...Answering of this question is giving us the soul of the history of the man or nation. The thoughts they had were the parents of the actions they did; their feelings were parents of their thoughts: it was the unseen and spiritual in them that determined the outward and actual;—their religion, as I say, was the great fact about them.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, 15.

¹⁹⁶ Herbert Paul, ed., *Letters of Lord Acton to Mary Gladstone, Daughter of the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone* (London: George Allen, 1904), 167.

¹⁹⁷ Acton to Mary Gladstone, 31 March 1883; see J. Rufus Fears, ed., *Essays in Religion, Politics, and Morality*, vol. III, *Selected Writings of Lord Acton* (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1988), 503.

¹⁹⁸ Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, 2-3.

For Carlyle, religion was the position taken (consciously or unconsciously) by a human being in front of reality. In this way, for him and for Acton and Dawson, it was a “key” for understanding a person or a nation or a culture.

With his sociological imagination and idea of religion as inherently related to the conditions of human nature and to human culture, Dawson began untangling the forces shaping his present. At the end of *The Gods of Revolution* he wrote, “The whole period from the French Revolution to the present day has been characterized by a continual struggle between conflicting ideologies.” After the Great War, the liberal hegemony of the nineteenth century passed away and fascism and communism were born as political forces. The economic depression of 1929 and the following years allowed all those forces demanding revolutionary solutions to assert themselves.¹⁹⁹ This situation created the new threat of totalitarianism. During the 1930s and 1940s Dawson turned to contemporary problems. He explained the rise of modern ideologies as pseudo-religions attempting to provide a new vision of life. *Religion and the Modern State* (1935), *Beyond Politics* (1939), and *The Judgment of the Nations* (1942) were the fruit of Dawson’s thought about religion and culture in his contemporary context.

¹⁹⁹ Dawson, *The Gods of Revolution*, 158-159, 162.

CHAPTER SIX

Politics

“When religion was expelled from their souls, the effect was not to create a vacuum or a state of apathy; it was promptly, if but momentarily, replaced by a host of new loyalties and secular ideals that not only filled the void but (to begin with) fired the popular imagination.”—Alexis de Tocqueville (1856)¹

Unlike other historians of his day, such as Hilaire Belloc, G. P. Gooch, and H. A. L. Fisher, Dawson was never involved more deeply in politics than his brief and unpleasant tenure in 1912 as unpaid private secretary to the Conservative Member of Parliament for Birmingham East, Arthur Steel-Maitland. Rather than politics, his studies during the 1910s and 1920s focused on the social sciences, the idea of progress, cultural development, historiography, and religion.

However, around 1929 or 1930 and the deepening of economic and political darkness, Dawson’s concerns began to shift. Now forty-years-old with two decades of independent study and two well-received books behind him, he began to feel the need to interpret current events in the light of history. Social problems, in his view, were no longer only the result of rampant individualism, but also of a new economic and

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (1856; New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), 156. As noted in the last chapter, Dawson wrote most of a book on the age of the French Revolution during the late 1930s—just as the political situation of his own day was turning in an alarming direction. In *Beyond Politics* (1939) he linked the two subjects together: “Anyone who studies the history of the First French Republic in the light of recent political developments cannot fail to be impressed by the way in which the Jacobins anticipated practically all the characteristic features of the modern totalitarian régimes: the dictatorship of a party in the name of the community, the use of propaganda and appeals to mass emotion, as well as violence and terrorism, the conception of revolutionary justice as a social weapon, the regulation of economic life in order to realize revolutionary ideals, and above all the attempt to enforce a uniform ideology on the whole people and the proscription and persecution of every other form of political thought.

“Moreover, the Jacobin democracy of 1793-4 was not only the prototype of the totalitarian State, it was also the matrix in which the main types of totalitarian ideology had their origin. It was the source not only of the strict republican democratic tradition which influenced in greater or less degree all the democratic movements of modern Europe, but also of the democratic Nationalism which found its first expression in the orators of the Convention and in Socialism which derives from the economic democracy of St. Just through Babeuf and Buonarrotti.” Christopher Dawson, *Beyond Politics* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1939), 71-72. In this way Dawson anticipated the work of J. L. Talmon in *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952).

political collectivism. One sees in his essays such new phrases (for him) as “mass-culture,” “crowd spirit,” “group-opinion,” “slogans” (a term Dawson highlighted as a significant modern expression)² and “totalitarian.”³ Dawson would go on to write many political articles during the 1930s, such as “Bolshevism and the Bourgeoisie”⁴ (1932), and three books on political subjects: *Religion and the Modern State* (1935), *Beyond Politics* (1939), and *The Judgment of the Nations* (1942). He would also participate in an international conference in Mussolini’s Rome in 1932, a high-brow discussion group (the Moot) in Britain, and a war-time British activist movement (the Sword of the Spirit), all of which had political implications.

From these sources and events it is possible to study Dawson’s perspective on interwar politics as a whole. This chapter begins with an analysis of the image of the Great War and its legacy in Dawson’s writings. This discussion will then draw on Dawson’s idea of religion as *religious sense inherently linked to human culture*⁵ in attempting to clarify his understanding of the rise of fascism, communism, and Nazism as “pseudo-religion[s],” “public religions,” or “secular religions.”⁶ With phrases such as these he characterized interwar political ideologies as symptoms of a spiritual and psychological void in Europe combined with the disastrous results of the Great War. This chapter will demonstrate the ways that Dawson used his ideas of

² Christopher Dawson, “European Democracy and the New Economic Forces,” *Sociological Review* XXII (1930): 39. This word was actually used as early as the sixteenth century in Scotland and Ireland to mean a “war-cry”; OED (accessed 29 July 2009).

³ ———, “The New Leviathan,” *Dublin Review* CLXXXV (1929): 97. I have not found an earlier use of “totalitarian” in Dawson’s writings. The word only entered English in 1926, associated with descriptions of Fascism—see “totalitarian” in OED (accessed 9 May 2009). Dawson later described “totalitarian” in the following way: “The existing totalitarian régimes have all originated in the same manner: viz. by the capture of the State machine by a political party which has then proceeded to reorganize the whole life of the community according to its programme and ideology.” Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, 8.

⁴ Christopher Dawson, “Bolshevism and the Bourgeoisie,” in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1956; Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002). This article first appeared as “The Significance of Bolshevism” in *The English Review* LV (September 1932): 239-250; reprinted in *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1933).

⁵ “It is impossible to separate culture from religion, and the further we go back in history, or the lower we descend in the scale of social development, the more closely are they related to one another. It is easy to understand the reason for this which is inherent in the nature of religion itself. For religion is not, as the rationalists of the last two centuries believed, a secondary phenomenon which has arisen from the exploitation of human credulity, or as Hobbes put it ‘from opinion of Ghosts, Ignorance of second causes, Devotion towards what men fear and Taking of things Casuall for Prognostiques’; it lies at the very centre of human consciousness, in man’s sense of his dependence on higher powers and of his relation to the spiritual world. The simpler a culture is the closer is its relation with religion, not of course because a low culture is more spiritual than the higher ones, but because the narrow limits of its control over nature increases man’s sense of dependence, so that it seems impossible for society to exist without the help of the mysterious powers that surround him.” ———, *The Judgment of the Nations* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1942), 94-95.

⁶ Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, 104, 105.

religion and “secular religion” as explanatory tools in his analysis of interwar politics, and how he responded practically to contemporary politics through the Sword of the Spirit movement.

Dawson linked the word *religion* (often with a qualifying adjective such as “pseudo” or “secular”) with *political ideology*. This was not unique to him. During the interwar years other thinkers who did this included the Frenchman Raymond Aron (1905-1983) and those connected to Germany or Austria such as Franz Werfel (1890-1945), Eric Voegelin (1901-1985), Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), and Romano Guardini (1885-1968).⁷ Dawson’s articles and books of the 1930s were among the first sustained discussion of “secular religions” in Britain. Today, the subject is attracting attention once again in the work of Michael Burleigh⁸ and the new journal *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* (begun in 2000).

Perhaps one factor that made possible this Europe-wide analysis of “political religions”⁹ in the interwar years was the shift away from viewing religion in terms of “church.” As shown in chapter five of this thesis, during the early twentieth century there arose sweeping new concepts of religion as *social force* (Durkheim, Weber,) and *religious experience* (James, Otto). The contemporary historian Emilio Gentile argues that “secular religion” became a plausible concept when considering the idea of the “sacred” developed by Rudolf Otto. The political dimension of human life can be a place of sacred experience “as frequently occurs during times of great collective emotion such as wars or revolutions.”¹⁰ Collective experience of the numinous, the fascinating-terrifying, can develop into beliefs and myths connected to a secular entity (such as nation, state, revolution, war, humanity, society, race, proletariat, liberty). The sacralization of politics happens when a “political movement confers a sacred status on an earthly entity...and renders it an absolute principle of collective

⁷ Hans Maier, “Political Religion: a Concept and its Limitations,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* VIII (2007). Article translated by Jodi Bruhn.

⁸ *Earthly Powers: Religion and Politics in Europe from the French Revolution to the Great War* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), and *Sacred Causes: Religion and Politics from the Great War to the War on Terror* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008).

⁹ Maier, “Political Religion: a Concept and its Limitations.” This article argues that political religions, while losing and even attacking all reference to the supernatural, nevertheless acted as systems of beliefs and religious surrogates which in some way strove for a new unity of old dichotomies (e.g., church and state, sacred and secular, etc.). See also: P. Burrin, “Political Religion,” *History and Memory* IX (1997): 321-349.

¹⁰ Emilio Gentile, “The Sacralization of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* I (2000): 29. Article translated by Robert Mallett. See also: Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. Keith Botsford (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

existence, considers it the main source of values for individual and mass behaviour, and exalts it as the supreme ethical precept of public life. It thus becomes an object of veneration and dedication, even to the point of self-sacrifice.”¹¹

Obviously, Lenin, Mussolini, and Hitler did not found religions in the usual sense of the word. Nevertheless, communism, fascism, and Nazism did resemble Durkheim’s description of religion as a “*unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions—beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church*. ...the idea of church suggests that religion must be something eminently collective.”¹² In the case of the political ideologies, the “sacred things” that were “set apart” may have been the social *ends* that were absolute (e.g., the classless society). Dawson wrote that the “determination to build Jerusalem, at once and on the spot, is the very force which is responsible for the intolerance and violence of the new political order.” In addition, he continued, “There are it is true quite a number of different Jerusalems: there is the Muscovite Jerusalem which has no Temple, there is Herr Hitler’s Jerusalem which has no Jews, and there is the Jerusalem of the social reformers which is all suburbs....”¹³ As demonstrated in the last chapter, Dawson drew from many of the leading religious theorists of the early twentieth century to shape his own anthropological and historical understanding of the functions of religion as both unitive and revolutionary-disruptive in its relations to culture. That concept informed his understanding of the political ideologies of his own times.

Interwar Politics and the Image of the Great War in Dawson’s Writings

¹¹ Gentile, “The Sacralization of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism,” 18-19.

¹² Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (1912; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 46. Emilio Gentile writes: “‘Totalitarianism’ has not only an institutional significance, applicable to a system of government and a method of government, but is also indicative of a *political process* activated by a revolutionary party in order to transform the people into a harmonious collective” (emphasis in the original). See: Gentile, “The Sacralization of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism,” 21. He continued: “Modernity has not eliminated the problem of religion from the consciousness of modern man. In fact, precisely because it has been a radical, overwhelming and irreversible force for change that has swept away ago-old collective beliefs and age-old, powerful institutions, modernity has created crisis and disorientation—situations which have, in turn, led to the re-emergence of the religious question, even if this has led the individual to turn not to traditional religion, but to new religions that sacralize the human” (31).

¹³ Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935), 109.

Dawson's political thinking largely took place in the context of the interwar years—a period Richard Overy has called the “Morbid Age.” Despite the fact that British political and social systems remained almost impervious to radical developments on the Continent, the ideas of “crisis” and “decline of civilization” became habitual ways in Britain of seeing the world. Diverse intellectuals used this language, such as Leonard Woolf (1880-1969), Sidney Webb (1859-1947), Marie Stopes (1880-1958), Julian Huxley (1887-1975), and many others. This sense of crisis was evident before the troubled 1930s; its roots lay even before the Great War. But the war “threw the whole culture of crisis into sharp relief...”¹⁴ Indeed, the Great War was one of the central background images in Dawson's mind against which he wrote about politics and “crisis.” In 1931 a series of talks by Dawson on “The Modern Dilemma” was broadcast on the BBC. They were published the following year. The talks were his answer to a definite question: “How are we to adjust ourselves to the vast movement of change which is sweeping over the world, tearing the old civilizations away from their traditional moorings and threatening to wreck society both spiritually and materially?” Today, after the “War and the Peace and the Russian Revolution and the Economic Crisis,” he wrote, “our illusions have disappeared and there is a danger that a pessimistic fatalism will take the place of the old optimistic faith in the inevitability of progress.”¹⁵ Dawson was not physically fit enough to fight in the Great War, but the mental image of it haunted almost everything he wrote in the interwar period, references to it cropping up everywhere, stimulating him to ask questions and think more deeply about modern dilemmas.

In one of his very first significant publications (1920) Dawson wrote: “The war presumably marks the end of an age no less decisively than did the wars of the French Revolution.” He characterized the previous age of the nineteenth century as one in which belief in “progress” masked exploitation and conquest of the world.¹⁶ In a paper read before the Sociological Society on 10 July 1923, he stated that the war alone was not responsible for the end of that age: “The reaction from the optimism and security [of the nineteenth century] that we are now experiencing is not, as is often thought, simply a product of the Great War. It was preparing during that period of material prosperity and spiritual disillusionment that followed 1870.” Nevertheless,

¹⁴ Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 2.

¹⁵ Christopher Dawson, *The Modern Dilemma* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932), 9, 10.

¹⁶ ———, “The Passing of Industrialism,” *Sociological Review* XII (1920): 6.

he continued, "It was the War, and still more the subsequent period of confusion and disillusionment which made the average man realise how fragile a thing our civilisation is, and how insecure are the foundations on which the elaborate edifice of the modern world-order rests."¹⁷

The Great War was not the sole cause of the interwar crisis. "It was itself to a great extent the product of the forces of disintegration that were already breaking up the nineteenth-century order." However, he wrote in 1935, as a direct result of the war European society lost its political and economic stability while the forces of disintegration were strengthened. "Above all," he wrote, the war "ruined the international organisation of world trade and world finance on which the prosperity of the capitalist order had been based, by its legacy of war debts and reparation payments and the resultant dislocation of currency as well as by the tariff barriers and the quota system that were the inevitable consequences of these conditions." "Thus the War is directly responsible for the economic crisis from which we are suffering to-day, for the breakdown of international trade with all its attendant evils, above all for the curse of unemployment."¹⁸

The Great War loomed over Dawson's first two books. His concern in *The Age of the Gods* (1928) with nationalistic political history as "one of the predisposing causes of the late War"¹⁹ has already been discussed in chapter four. Though fundamentally hopeful, images of the war and pessimism also motivated his second book *Progress and Religion* (1929): "The accumulated strain and suffering of four years of war ended either in defeat and revolution, or in victory and disillusion, and it was natural enough that, in such circumstances, there should be a tendency to despair of the future of Europe...."²⁰

In his articles for the *Dublin Review* in the late 1920s he labeled the decade since the Great War as the "European crisis," and noted the declining prestige of parliamentarianism and representative institutions.²¹ In 1931 he wrote that, "Ever since the war Europe has been fighting a losing battle with the forces of dissolution.

¹⁷ ———, "Progress and Decay in Ancient and Modern Civilisation," *Sociological Review* XVI (1924): 1, 2.

¹⁸ Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, 1-2.

¹⁹ Christopher Dawson, *The Age of the Gods: A Study in the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient East* (London: John Murray, 1928), xiii.

²⁰ ———, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry* (1929; Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 3.

²¹ ———, "The Crisis of the West," *Dublin Review* CLXXXI (1927): 261; Dawson, "The New Leviathan," 94.

The world supremacy that European civilisation possessed in the last century is a thing of the past and to-day its very existence is in danger.” The moral prestige of the West is lost; the average “European intellectual seems prepared only to lie down and die.” Furthermore, “since the war there are ominous signs of an anti-humanitarian reaction. We have seen the revival of political terrorism and religious persecution, the massacre and intimidation of minorities and the emergence of the gunman and the professional assassin. Torture seems to have become an accepted part of police methods alike in Eastern Europe and in America, while in Russia a large section of the population has been reduced to a condition hardly distinguishable from serfdom.”²²

During the years of economic depression and the National Government in Britain, Dawson in 1935 wrote that, “The last three years have been, perhaps, the most anxious and disturbed of all the sixteen restless years since 1918. They have seen the collapse of parliamentary institutions in Central Europe, the German revolution, the advent of President Roosevelt in the United States and his far-reaching plans for economic reconstruction, the secession of Japan and Germany from the League of Nations, the failure of the World Economic Conference and the Disarmament Conference, and the assassination of the Austrian Chancellor and the King of Yugoslavia.”²³ Dawson criticized the Conservative and Liberal parties in Britain for failing to advance even a modicum of social philosophy which could compete with that of Socialism. He criticized the National Government for not being truly national and advocated recovering the traditional two-party, parliamentary system. He also recognized the centralizing tendencies of the 1930s working against any recovery of that system.²⁴ Nevertheless, nodding toward the government, he wrote that, “Britain is, in fact, almost the only country in Europe which has met the world crisis

²² Carl Schmitt, *The Necessity of Politics* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1931), Christopher Dawson's Introduction, 12, 13, 19. Schmitt (1888-1985) was born into a German Catholic family and became a prominent jurist, political theorist, and professor of law. He was professor at the University of Berlin (1933-1945) and his theories helped underpin the Nazi regime. He favored a strong, even dictatorial executive. Before these loyalties developed, however, Dawson (in this 1931 Introduction) praised him as a “scientific jurist” working against the conception of religion as essentially a private matter: “to a Catholic and a jurist like Professor Schmitt, the public and representative character of Catholicism is a proof of its truth and its universality” (10).

²³ Christopher Dawson, “The Future of National Government,” *Dublin Review* CXCVI (1935): 236.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 244-246.

successfully by constitutional means, and consequently it is the only great country in which the parliamentary system is still practically unchallenged.”²⁵

What were the political consequences of the Great War and the following years of crisis in Dawson’s perspective? In 1936 he wrote in the *Tablet*: “Today...the decline of Liberalism...has led to the reassertion of Nationalism and Socialism in their pure, undiluted form. This process had already begun before the War with the appearance of syndicalism and the theory of direct action among the Socialists and the rise of a new type of militant Nationalism and racialism on the Continent. The post-War period has seen the culmination of these tendencies, respectively, in the revolutionary Communism of Russia and the Third International, and in the National dictatorships of the Fascist type. ...Both [movements] represent a reaction against the individualism that was characteristic of the nineteenth century and a tendency to return to more communal forms of social life and culture.”²⁶ In this way the Great War had “set loose the impulse to community.”²⁷

Where was that impulse leading? Unfortunately, toward the ideological alignment of political parties. During the post-war period, Dawson remarked in 1939, political parties on the Continent came to resemble those in France during the Revolution of the 1790s, defining themselves in terms of ideological oppositions. That situation contrasted with the traditional English party system in which the parties did not, save at rare moments, stand for any coherent body of ideas. “The conflict of [English] parties is not a fight to the death: it is a game that can only be played by a strict adherence to the rules.”²⁸ That game was essentially one of *limited* politics. “Now the new totalitarian parties differ from the old parliamentary ones not only by their exclusiveness and their use of violent methods. They also cover a much wider field of social activity and attempt to deal with deeper and more fundamental issues. They are in fact cultural as well as political organizations and it is in this field that their most striking successes have been won.”²⁹ The rise of this new kind of ideological politics was significant. It drove the rise of totalitarian parties, carrying them forward on a

²⁵ Ibid.: 237.

²⁶ ———, “Religion in the Age of Revolution: Part V: The Turn of the Tide,” *Tablet* 17 October 1936, 516.

²⁷ Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, 67.

²⁸ ———, “The New Leviathan,” 94. See also *Beyond Politics*, 40.

²⁹ ———, *Beyond Politics*, 54.

tidal wave of the “cult of power” which demanded that the “whole of life shall be devoted and dedicated to that social end which they regard as supremely valuable.”³⁰

Crisis in the Void: The Political and Religious Problem of Totalitarian Power

Why did ideological politics rise up after the Great War? Dawson saw the period of the 1920s, after the materialism and individualism of the late nineteenth century and the violence of the Great War, as a decade-long spiritual and psychological void in which new religious interests arose. “The last generation—the generation of H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw—was still prepared to idealise the machine and to place its hopes in a mechanised Utopia,” he wrote in 1931. “The present generation has lost this confidence and is beginning to feel the need for a return to religion and a recovery of the religious attitude to life which the European mind has lost during the last two or three centuries.” This tendency appeared not only among the Conservatives and traditionalists, as it had in the nineteenth century. “On the contrary, it is especially characteristic of the most modern of the moderns and of those who are in revolt against the existing order of things—of men like the late D. H. Lawrence and Mr. Middleton Murry and Mr. T. S. Eliot in this country, of Hugo Ball and Stefan George in Germany, and of Jacques Rivière, Charles du Bos and François Mauriac in France.” In France this tendency had reaffirmed Catholicism. “Elsewhere, and especially in England, it still retains to a great extent the ideals of humanism and of the Enlightenment.... Consequently they [men such as Lawrence and Murry] retain the old rationalist hostility to the idea of the supernatural and the transcendent. They have come to realise the dangers that a thorough-going scientific materialism or even a rationalist of the eighteenth-century type involves from the point of view of humanism.” Therefore, these men “seek a *natural* religion in the sense of a religion without metaphysic or dogma or revelation—a religion without God.”³¹

That was Dawson’s interpretation of the Great War and the 1920s: the collapse of empires and certainties created something of a spiritual and psychological void. By the end of the 1920s that void and its corresponding desire for revolt against the status quo had begun to be filled by new political movements: “the revolutionary socialism of modern Europe...is not merely a dissatisfaction with material conditions, it is a

³⁰ Ibid., 11, 105.

³¹ Christopher Dawson, *Christianity and the New Age* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1931), 26-27. One thinks also of Julian Huxley’s *Religion without Revelation* (1927) and in the USA the *Humanist Manifesto* (1933).

movement of spiritual disaffection against the modern social order and a demand for a new life.”³² In *The Spectator* (1931) he wrote: “There is no doubt that Socialism and Communism and all the movements of revolt that threaten to destroy the modern social order draw much of their strength from a spiritual dissatisfaction with an order that is purely materialistic. Modern industrial civilization is morally discredited, not because it is physically oppressive or because it involves any peculiar hardship to the individual, but because it stands for no spiritual principle and has no religious spirit behind it.”³³

By the mid 1930s Dawson wrote more bluntly. The new ideologies were a kind of *pseudo religion* arising out of a spiritual void, he thought. The new parties were like religious orders—or further: they were more like a church than a state since membership was based on profession of a creed or ideology and on faith in the gospel of the leader rather than on citizenship. “In my last article I pointed out that the nineteenth-century Liberal conception of the separation of religion and politics is no longer applicable to the new type of religion or pseudo religion which appeals directly to the social conscience and finds its expression in the field of politics and economics.” He continued: “The most important of these new public religions are Socialism and Nationalism. These new creeds arose in the Liberal age—in the spiritual void that Liberalism had created by its secularization of social life, and they grew until they have not only destroyed Liberalism but have come to threaten Democracy itself, in so far as Democracy is to be identified with Parliamentarism and representative institutions, i.e., the elements that are common to Democracy and Liberalism.”³⁴

Despite this criticism of “Liberalism” as separating public and private spheres in the name of personal freedom and economic freedom and intellectual freedom, Dawson looked kindly upon it. He distinguished between the liberal *tradition*, which had deep roots in European and American history; the liberal *ideology*, which owed as much to France as to England; and liberalism as a *party name*, which originated in

³² Dawson, “The Crisis of the West,” 267.

³³ Christopher Dawson, “The Problem of Wealth,” *Spectator* CXLVII (17 October 1931): 485.

³⁴ ———, “Church, State and Community,” *Tablet* 26 June 1937, 909. See also: Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, 9–10, 104–105. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that the leaders of the French Revolution “had a fanatical faith in their vocation—that of transforming the social system, root and branch, and regenerating the whole human race. Of this passionate idealism was born what was in fact a new religion, giving rise to some of those vast changes in human conduct that religion has produced in other ages.” Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, 156.

Spain. There had been many varieties of liberalism, such that it could appear conservative in one country and revolutionary in another.³⁵ Therefore, it was “useless to discuss liberalism in the abstract unless one bears in mind the concrete social and historical background of the different forms of liberalism.” Dawson saw the deep-rooted liberal tradition, and its political expression “liberalism,” as key to re-orienting Western society away from totalitarianism.³⁶

However, from his vantage point in 1942, it was useless to try to revive the old liberal parties and recapture power by the old political methods. That was because Europe was faced with so many problems outside the scope of politics in the old sense. Totalitarianism attempted to solve these social and economic problems by reordering life itself—and that was the reason for its appeal.³⁷ The “revolutionary attitude” inside those systems was based, Dawson thought as early as 1929, on the desire for a whole new kind of life:

The revolutionary attitude—and it is perhaps the characteristic religious attitude of Modern Europe—is in fact nothing but a symptom of the divorce between religion and social life. The 19th century revolutionaries—the anarchists, the socialists, and to some extent the liberals—were driven to their destructive activities by the sense that actual European society was a mere embodiment of material force and fraud—“magnum latrocinium,” as St. Augustine says—that it was based on no principle of justice, and organized for no spiritual or ideal end; and the more the simpler and more obvious remedies—Republicanism, Universal Suffrage, National Self-Determination—proved disappointing to the reformers, the deeper became their dissatisfaction with the whole structure of existing society. And so, finally, when the process of disillusionment is complete, this religious impulse that lies behind the revolutionary attitude may turn itself against social life altogether, or at least against the whole system of civilization that has been built up in the last two centuries.³⁸

Here again, Dawson characterized the revolutionary, totalitarian development as a *religious attitude* because it sought the complete reordering of life and the exultation of new ideals by which to unify large numbers of people. To the extent that the liberals had separated religion from social life, they had, ironically, undermined their own foundations and paved the way for the rise of the dictatorships.

³⁵ Dawson, *The Judgment of the Nations*, 57-59.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 61, 70.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 70-71. J. M. Keynes had foreseen these conditions in 1919. “It is an extraordinary fact that the fundamental economic problems of a Europe starving and disintegrating before their eyes, was the one question in which it was impossible to arouse the interest of the Four [at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 which Keynes attended].” He continued: “By combining a popular hatred of the class of entrepreneurs with the blow already given to social security by the violent and arbitrary disturbance of contract and of the established equilibrium of wealth which is the inevitable result of inflation, [the European governments] are fast rendering impossible a continuance of the social and economic order of the nineteenth century. But they have no plan for replacing it.” John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919; New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920), 226, 237.

³⁸ Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*, 178.

Dawson and the Dictatorships

If in Dawson's interpretation the political ideologies that Lenin, Mussolini, and Hitler helped inaugurate were symptoms of the Great War and its aftermath, how did communism, fascism, and Nazism fit particularly into Dawson's interpretation?

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870-1924), the Russian revolutionary, was able to travel to Russia in 1917 and immediately take a leading role in the Bolshevik movement as a direct result of the Great War. "The age of the Great War was an age of iron," Dawson wrote in 1933, "but it gave birth to no military genius and no great statesman; its political leaders were men of paper. The one man of iron that the age produced arose from the most unlikely quarter that it is possible to conceive—from among the fanatics and revolutionary agitators who wandered about the watering places of Switzerland and Germany conspiring ineffectually and arguing with one another."³⁹ That man was Lenin.

In 1919 John Maynard Keynes wrote of the situation in Russia, Austria, and Hungary where "the miseries of life and the disintegration of society are too notorious to require analysis." Those territories "are the signal to us of how in the final catastrophe the malady of the body passes over into malady of the mind. Economic privation proceeds by easy stages...until the limit of human endurance is reached at last and counsels of despair and madness stir the sufferers from the lethargy which precedes the crisis. Then man shakes himself," Keynes continued, "and the bonds of custom are loosed. The power of ideas is sovereign, and he listens to whatever instruction of hope, illusion, or revenge is carried to him on the air."⁴⁰ Dawson's interpretation was similar. He wrote of the "spiritual results of the War" which were "not less serious than the economic [results]." The Great War "dealt a mortal blow to the idealism and optimism and humanitarianism of European liberalism and aroused instincts of violence which had hitherto been dormant. In a word it changed the spiritual atmosphere of Europe. Thus while Communism and the ideal of social revolution were by no means new, they acquired a new significance and power of appeal in the changed atmosphere and circumstances of the world after the War."⁴¹

³⁹ Christopher Dawson, "The Significance of Bolshevism," in *Enquiries into Religion and Culture*, by Christopher Dawson (London: Sheed & Ward, 1933), 23.

⁴⁰ Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, 249, 250, 251.

⁴¹ Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, 2-3.

That appeal reached to Britain where during the 1930s sanguine images of Stalin dominated (in contrast to usually negative ones of Hitler).⁴² There was, in fact, widespread endorsement in Britain of the Soviet system. Such endorsement, Richard Overy suggests, “has to be explained not in terms of Soviet realities but as a projection of strong impulses for philanthropic relief and social reform in Britain. The Soviet Union was used as a crude measure of what was deemed to be deficient or decadent or unjust about British social realities.” During the economic hardship of the 1930s, revulsion to British realities led to a growing progressive demand for a New Jerusalem, the possibility of which the Soviet Union seemed to give evidence.⁴³ Julian Huxley visited Russia during the summer of 1931 and praised the country for its devotion to large-scale planning and to science—in short for being “in advance of other countries....”⁴⁴ G. D. H. and Margaret Cole wrote that most people would agree that the “Western world has very much to learn, if not slavishly to imitate, from the Russians,” and that the Russian workers “do feel themselves to be engaged upon a really worthwhile task of social construction, in strong contrast to the spirit of disillusionment which pervades all classes in the capitalist world.”⁴⁵ For Sidney and Beatrice Webb Soviet communism was “A New Civilisation.”⁴⁶

Influenced by Continental scholars more critical of communism,⁴⁷ in 1933 Dawson asked: What was the reason Bolshevism attracted the discontented and the disinherited proletariat, as well as the disinterested idealist? The disorder of individualistic materialism, in his interpretation, created a situation in Europe in

⁴² Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars*, 282.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 288, 290.

⁴⁴ Julian Huxley, *A Scientist among the Soviets* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932), 131.

⁴⁵ G. D. G. Cole and Margaret Cole, *A Guide to Modern Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1934), 192; G. D. G. Cole and Margaret Cole, *The Intelligent Man's Review of Europe Today* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933), 478.

⁴⁶ Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936). The title of the 1937 edition dropped the question mark.

⁴⁷ The Romanian-born René Fuenfegger-Miller (1891-1963) published his *Geist und Gesicht des Bolschewismus* in 1926. It was translated by F. S. Flint and D. F. Tait as *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism* (1927). Fuenfegger-Miller wrote that, “Anyone trained in the exact methods of thought of the West can see nothing in this Bolshevik materialism but one of those substitute religions which, since the decay of the earlier faith centred in the Church and the rise of scientific rationalism, have continually kept springing up to provide humanity with a new creed in place of the faith they have lost, and to satisfy their eternal yearning for freedom from all evil in new forms adapted to the scientific spirit of the present time.” René Fuenfegger-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism* (1926; New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 71. Dawson referenced this book in his article “The New Leviathan,” 96. The Russian-born Waldemar Gurian (1902-1954) published his *Der Bolschewismus. Einführung in Geschichte und Lehre* in 1931. It was translated by Dawson's friend, E. I. Watkin, as *Bolshevism: Theory and Practice* (1932). Dawson drew from this book in his article “The Significance of Bolshevism” referenced below.

which any regime which offered a positive and objective end of life became attractive. Why? Because, he explained, “Man cannot live in a spiritual void; he needs some fixed social standards and some absolute intellectual principles. Bolshevism at least replaces the spiritual anarchy of bourgeois society by a rigid order and substitutes for the doubt and scepticism of an irresponsible intelligentsia the certitude of an absolute authority embodied in social institutions.”⁴⁸ “Bolshevism is not a political movement that can be judged by its practical aims and achievements,” he wrote, “nor is it an abstract theory that can be understood apart from its historical context. It differs from other contemporary movements above all by its organic unity, its fusion of theory and practice, and by the way in which its practical policy is bound up with its philosophy. In a world of relativity and skepticism it stands for absolute principles; for a creed that is incarnate in a social order and for an authority that demands the entire allegiance of the whole man.”⁴⁹

For Dawson, the constant attempt to remold life according to shared beliefs meant that the Communist party had little resemblance to a political party in the ordinary sense. “It is a voluntary organisation only in the same sense as is a religious order. Its members are bound by a rigid and impersonal discipline.... The proletariat that they serve is a mystical entity—the universal church of the Marxian believer—and the actual populace is an unregenerate mass which it is their duty to guide and organize according to the principles of the true faith. The communist is not a representative of the people: he is the priest of an idea.”⁵⁰ Ironically, in this way, “in one important respect they [the political ideologies] are more religious than the religion of the average modern Christian. They refuse to divide life. They demand that the whole of life shall be devoted and dedicated to that social end which they regard as supremely valuable.”⁵¹

Dawson was not alone in using religious metaphors to describe communism. George Bernard Shaw wrote that, “Russia has not only political and economic strength: she has also religious strength. The Russians have a creed in which they believe; and it is a catholic creed.”⁵² Describing the new civilization arising in

⁴⁸ Dawson, “The Significance of Bolshevism,” 21, 26-27.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵¹ ———, *Beyond Politics*, 105.

⁵² George Bernard Shaw, “Fabianism in Action,” *Times*, 13 August 1931, 6. He continued: “To call them religious, and the Third International a Catholic Church, seems to them a Shavian joke, as it may seem to some of our own Catholics a Shavian blasphemy.”

Russia—and hinting at their own social philosophy—the Webbs included chapters in volume two of *Soviet Communism* on “The Remaking of Man,” “Science the Salvation of Mankind,” and “The Good Life.” The Coles noted that the Communist Party “has been likened to...the Jesuit Order,” and indeed required high levels of faith, discipline, and devotion, but they denied the comparison because the members “are not cut off from the world, either by celibacy or any other distinguishing condition....”⁵³ Nevertheless, the Webbs specifically compared the Communist party to a “typical religious order in the Roman Catholic Church” and highlighted its membership based on denial of private property, acceptance of a creed, passage through a probationary period, voluntary good social works, assessments of character, rendering of obedience, and periodic “cleansing” through “public inquisition.”⁵⁴ A distinctive feature for them was the new way of life inaugurated by communism—the promotion, “among all its participants, what it conceives to be ‘the good life’....”⁵⁵ On the literary scene, the American Robert Jordan, main character in Ernest Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), commented that fighting for the Republic (whose propaganda in English was largely shaped by the Communists) felt like a “crusade.” The Spanish woman, Pilar, remarked that, “I believe firmly in the Republic and I have faith. I believe in it with fervor as those who have religious faith believe in the mysteries.”⁵⁶

Dawson recognized that Lenin understood the power of ideas, of theory, of insistence on the philosophical absolutism of the Communist creed. “Thus the communist system, as planned and largely created by Lenin, was a kind of *atheocracy*, a spiritual order of the most rigid and exclusive type, rather than a political order.”⁵⁷ “It is true,” he continued, “that the Bolshevik philosophy is a poor thing at best. ...Nevertheless, it is enough of a philosophy to provide society with a theoretic basis, and therein lies the secret of its strength. The lesson of Bolshevism is that any philosophy is better than no philosophy, and that a *régime* which possesses a principle of authority, however misconceived it may be, will be stronger than a system that rests on the shifting basis of private interests and private opinions.” A problem with Western Europe was its lack of principles of social and economic order,

⁵³ Cole and Cole, *A Guide to Modern Politics*, 187, 189, 190.

⁵⁴ Webb and Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?*, I: 340, 342, 345, 348, 376.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, II: 807.

⁵⁶ Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940; New York: Collier Books/Macmillan, 1968), 90, 235.

⁵⁷ Dawson, “The Significance of Bolshevism,” 24.

coupled with its loss of all vital relations to its own spiritual traditions on which the old European order was based.⁵⁸ That situation in Italy, for example, created a spiritual and psychological void into which walked Mussolini.

Benito Mussolini (1883-1945), the Italian politician, had fought in the Great War and received severe wounds before his disillusion and break with Socialism by 1919. He wanted to revive the Italian nation in a new way and founded the fascist movement in that year. Taking advantage of the political and economic chaos of the immediate post-war years, the movement was by 1922 already the most significant political force in the country. Mussolini was able to turn Italy into a dictatorship by 1929.

Dawson's closest personal contact with Mussolini's fascism came in 1932. From the 14th to the 20th of November that year, the Royal Academy of Italy⁵⁹ held the second Volta meeting⁶⁰ on the subject of "Europe." "Distinguished leaders of thought" were invited to discuss European unity and the, "Position, value and functions of Europe in the contemporary world before and after the war." The invitation sent to him by the Royal Academy of Italy opened with the following: "The fact is now universally recognized that Europe is at the present time passing through a historic crisis of capital importance, not only as regards her political and economic life, but also as regards her world reputation and prestige." The Great War and its aftermath were cited as important and largely self-inflicted factors in the "historic crisis." Nevertheless, the invitation continued, "one remains conscious that there exists a European unity, historic and spiritual in character, that admits of definition and that is the resultant of deep-seated internal affinities and of some thousands of years of joint effort in the most essential branches of human activity, from religion to

⁵⁸ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁹ Guglielmo Marconi (1874-1937), the Italian inventor, was made President of the Royal Academy of Italy in 1930 by Mussolini. The Academy had been founded in 1926. It helped to strengthen the hold of the Fascist regime on intellectual life. Marconi was best known for his development of a radiotelegraph system which served as the basis for the establishment of numerous affiliated companies worldwide. He shared the 1909 Nobel Prize in Physics with Karl Ferdinand Braun for contributions to the development of wireless telegraphy. Marconi joined the Fascist Party in 1923.

⁶⁰ The Volta conference was the name given to each of the international conferences held in Italy by the Royal Academy. It was funded by the Alessandro Volta Foundation. In the interwar period these conferences covered a number of topics in science and the humanities. The first conference, held at Lake Como in 1927, led to the public introduction of the uncertainty principle by Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg.

law, from science to poetry, from economics to art, in a word from spiritual to practical life values.”⁶¹ For Dawson: so far, so good.

However, everything was not as it seemed. Christina Scott wrote an interesting account of this 1932 meeting. Dawson, who published his *Making of Europe* that year, was part of a British delegation of five: James Rennell Rodd (1858-1941), who had been the British Ambassador to Rome from 1908 to 1919; Gerald Lymington (1898-1984), the environmentalist and Conservative MP for Basingstoke at the time of the conference; Charles Petrie (1895-1977), the Conservative Catholic historian; and Paul Einzig (1897-1973), the economist. Among the outstanding figures from other countries at the conference included the distinguished politician Count Albert Apponyi (1846-1933) from Hungary; Stefan Zweig (1881-1942), the Austrian historical novelist; Louis Bertrand (1866-1941), the French novelist and historian; Daniel Halévy (1872-1962), the French historian whose work Dawson particularly admired; Herman Göering (1893-1946), who had been president of the German Reichstag since August 1932; and Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946), the Nazi theorist. “What most of the European delegates did not realise,” Scott wrote, “and it was a factor which annoyed Christopher considerably, was that this was no historical or academic conference as they had been led to believe but a ‘put-up job’ by Mussolini’s government to turn events to their own ends.” Everywhere the delegates went they were followed and spied upon. However, they were also entertained in sumptuous splendor by the government at the Excelsior Hotel. The meetings were formal occasions at which morning dress and top hats were *de rigueur*; for the evening functions “it was full evening dress, uniforms and decorations for those who had them.”⁶² Charles Petrie recalled an amusing incident, when Göering, whose turn it was to preside, made an announcement regarding the wearing of decorations at an official reception that evening. His French was so poor, however, that no one understood. Playing safely, everyone arrived that evening with decorations—except Göering.⁶³

⁶¹ STA, box 1a, folder name: “Invitation to the Royal Academy of Italy’s ‘Volta’ Meeting for the Moral and Historical Sciences” (1932).

⁶² Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson* (1984; New Brunswick: Transaction, 1992), 105-106.

⁶³ Charles Petrie, *Chapters of Life* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1950), 185-186. Petrie also recalled that a “long-winded German was getting well into his stride when Lord Rennell suggested that he and I should retire for a drink. When we had done so he remarked, ‘Let me give you a word of advice as an old man to a young one. When Germans talk about things that end in *-ismus*, and

The opening ceremony, at which Guglielmo Marconi and Mussolini spoke, was in the Julius Caesar Hall on the Capitol, not far from the place where Dawson had conceived of his life work writing the history of culture in 1909. The meetings took place in the Farnese Palace. Dawson's lecture was on "Interracial Cooperation as a Factor in European Culture." In it, he traced the role of the different races in European history; toward the end he noted that the "relatively benign Nationalism of the early Romantics paved the way for the fanaticism of the modern pan-racial theorists who subordinate civilization to skull measurements and who infuse an element of racial hatred into the political and economic rivalries of European peoples." However, he continued, with words that must not have pleased the Nazi element in the audience, "It is obvious that these theories do not correspond to cultural facts. Even the national cultures themselves are due to the co-operation of different racial elements, and if we were to subtract from German culture, for example, all the contributions made by men who were not of pure Nordic type, German culture would be incalculably impoverished." He argued that European culture had developed by a continuous process of international and interracial collaboration. "The great problem of the present age is to find a new basis for this work of vital collaboration."⁶⁴ A brave stand indeed.

Scott recounted that the highlight of the event was a dinner given by Mussolini on behalf of the Italian government in the Grand Hotel. Her mother Valery had the "doubtful honour of being placed next to Göering at the high table and only two places from Mussolini—she also had to submit to having her hand kissed by Göering when they were introduced." Scott continued: "Conversation with him tended to be heavy going; not only was there the language barrier but his mind was evidently more in Berlin than in Rome at that moment. He was constantly leaning across the lady next him on the other side to talk excitedly to Mussolini about some impending event of great importance to him; eventually a telegram arrived for him in the middle of the dinner with the news of Von Papen's resignation as Chancellor of the Reichstag, which meant Hitler's rise to power, and after brief apologies he left to fly back to

Frenchmen about things that end in *-ologie*, it is wisest for an Englishman to withdraw to the bar" (186). Petrie remembered Dawson as "one of the deepest thinkers of our time" (145).

⁶⁴ Christopher Dawson, "Interracial Cooperation as a Factor in European Culture," in *Convegno Volta* (Rome: Reale Accademia D'Italia, 1933), 8-9. This essay is obscure. I found a copy of it in STA, box 1a, folder name: "Invitation to the Royal Academy of Italy's 'Volta' Meeting for the Moral and Historical Sciences" (1932).

Berlin. The Austrian Minister, who was also sitting next to Valery, said he hoped Göering's plane would come down in the Alps!"⁶⁵

Despite Dawson's attendance at this conference, he did not have any sympathy for fascism, at least in published form. In fact, quite the opposite, as evidenced by his diagnostic but laudatory chapter on democracy published in *The Modern Dilemma* during the very month (November) when he was in Rome. However, while never identifying himself with one kind of political system (even democracy), by the mid to the late 1930s one detects a different tone in his political thinking. He became more critical of political tendencies in his own country. In 1934 he noted that the modern state continued to extend control over a wider area of social life. "Society and culture are becoming *politicized*," he wrote (*italics his*). He continued:

In the old days the statesman was responsible for the preservation of internal order and the defense of the state against its enemies. Today he is called on to deal more and more with questions of a purely sociological character, and he may even be expected to transform the whole structure of society and refashion the cultural traditions of the people. The abolition of war, the destruction of property, the control of the birth-rate, the elimination of the unfit—these are questions which the statesman of the past would no more have dared to meddle with than the course of the seasons or the movements of the stars; yet they are all vital issues today, and some of them figure on the agenda of our political parties.⁶⁶

A harsher critique of England came in 1935: "As soon as Liberalism is abandoned and the Right turns towards dictatorships and the Left to Marxism, the existence of the Parliamentary system is in danger. This is what has happened on the Continent, and though it has not yet happened in England, we have already traveled a good way in the same direction, as may be seen in the failure of pure Liberalism (as distinct from Liberal Conservatism and Liberal Socialism) to maintain its traditional position in English public life."⁶⁷ Furthermore: "It may, I think, even be argued that Communism in Russia, National Socialism in Germany, and Capitalism and Liberal Democracy in the Western countries are really three forms of the same thing, and that they are all moving by different but parallel paths to the same goal, which is the mechanization of human life and the complete subordination of the individual to the state and to the economic process."⁶⁸ In 1939 Dawson repeated that argument, comparing his country with Germany and Italy: "The forces that make for social uniformity and the mechanization of culture are no less strong in England and the

⁶⁵ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 106-107.

⁶⁶ Christopher Dawson, "Sociology as a Science," in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1956; Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002), 32-33.

⁶⁷ Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, 30.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, xv.

United States than in Germany and Italy, so that we might expect to see the rise of a democratic totalitarianism which would make the same universal claims on the life of the individual as the totalitarian dictatorships of the Continent.”⁶⁹

Though during the Second World War his tone changed again in support of England and her government, during the mid to late 1930s Dawson’s criticism of democracy and his attempt to understand the origins, rise, and extent of fascism confused some people about his own position. For example, he wrote (in 1935): “Fascism is a real thing, a spontaneous reaction of Western or Central European society to the new conditions of the post-war epoch.”⁷⁰ Viewed out of context, and combined with his comparison and contrast of Catholic (papal) social teaching with fascism, this sentence could lead to misinterpretation of Dawson’s position on fascism—which did happen and which led Dawson to refuse to allow for the republication of *Religion and the Modern State* (1935).⁷¹ For example, in a review of this book in *The Spectator*: “Mr. Dawson seems to me a little too indulgent to Fascism, and not sufficiently alive to the importance of defending the democratic front. He associates democratic self-government with economic laissez-faire too easily and dissociates both economic and political freedom from spiritual liberty too readily....”⁷² In *The Times Literary Supplement* he was also viewed as giving a favorable opinion of fascism.⁷³ The Catholic writer Bernard Wall (1908-1974), who had been involved in London’s Catholic Worker movement during the 1930s, remembered that “some people thought that Christopher and I were pro-Fascist. This confusion arose because in the general hysteria of the time...Christopher went on calmly disentangling the sociological threads in Europe....”⁷⁴

English Catholic support of Franco during the 1930s led to a widespread belief that Catholics supported fascism. Even during the 1940s a certain Bruno P. Schlesinger could write the very first doctoral dissertation (University of Notre Dame, 1949) on Dawson and misunderstand his sociological approach. His dissertation, “Christopher Dawson and the Modern Political Crisis,” claimed that Dawson’s political thought

⁶⁹ ———, *Beyond Politics*, 3.

⁷⁰ ———, *Religion and the Modern State*, 8.

⁷¹ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 123-127.

⁷² H. G. Wood, “Religion and State Idols,” review of *Religion and the Modern State*, *Spectator*, 9 August 1935, 231.

⁷³ Harold Martin Stannard, “The Christian and the World,” review of *Religion and the Modern State*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 August 1935, 520.

⁷⁴ Bernard Wall, *Headlong into Change: An Autobiography and a Memoir of Ideas Since the Thirties* (London: Harvill, 1969), 89.

changed dramatically from before the Second World War (1933-1939) to after (1939-1949). The first phase of his writings, Schlesinger claimed, revealed anti-democratic and pro-Fascist leanings, and in the second, one sees a complete reversal.⁷⁵ Schlesinger wrote: "Dawson sees the rise of Fascism against the background of the decay of the nineteenth century order. He sees it as a genuine attempt to solve the problems created by World War I, and as a positive effort to construct a new social order."⁷⁶

Unfortunately, it seems that Schlesinger mistook Dawson's sociological perspective for prescriptive utterances. He did not understand that Dawson portrayed fascism as a response to the need for community. This need was a real human need, though fascism was not applauded as the ideal solution. In a letter written on 24 January 1950 to Schlesinger, Dawson defended his views: *Religion and the Modern State* had not departed from previous ideas, nor had he departed from his views later on. He also noted that Schlesinger had mistaken his exposition of the case for totalitarianism as his own, and the book was essentially anti-totalitarian. Later on in America, Schlesinger would become one of Dawson's closest friends, who worked closely with him to promote a scheme for the study of Christian culture (such a program began under Schlesinger at St. Mary's, Notre Dame, in 1956).⁷⁷

While Dawson undoubtedly possessed a conservative temperament,⁷⁸ he was firstly a scholar trying to understand the world around him. He was by no means a "man of the Right" supporting

⁷⁵ Bruno P. Schlesinger, "Christopher Dawson and the Modern Political Crisis" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1949), 3.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁷⁷ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 11, 126.

⁷⁸ In Dawson's papers there is a lecture he wrote on "Conservatism" in June 1932. He wrote: "There is no doubt that the Conservative conception of the organic nature of society & its ideal of the cooperation of the different classes & economic interests in the nation towards a common cultural end is far more sympathetic to the national genius than is the Socialist absolutism whether in its revolutionary or in its Fabian form. Nevertheless it would be a mistake to underestimate the strength of the appeal that Socialism makes to the modern mind. The basis of this appeal is however not so much political or economic as religious. Socialism offers men not political order but social salvation; not responsible government but a deliverance from the sense of moral guilt that oppresses modern society: or rather the shifting of that burden from society as a whole to some abstract power such as capitalism or finance or bourgeois civilization which is endowed with the attributes of a powerful & malevolent spirit. Thus Socialism is

able to enlist all those religious emotions & impulses which no longer find an outlet through their old religious channels. The type of man who a century ago would have been a revivalist or even the founder of a new sect, today devotes himself to social & political propaganda. And this gives Socialism a spiritual power which the older political parties did not possess, though Liberalism especially on the Continent showed similar tendencies. ...For while Liberalism is a philosophy & Socialism is a religion,

fascism. For example, the previous quotation “Fascism is a real thing” continued: “And if we wish to find the sources of its ideas [fascism] we shall not find them among the reactionaries and the supporters of Capitalism, but in the Socialist camp itself among the most extreme partisans of social revolution. The true spiritual progenitor of Fascism was one of the most original and paradoxical of modern Socialist writers. This was Georges Sorel, who was well known before the War as the advocate of revolutionary syndicalism and whose ideas had a considerable influence not only on Mussolini but also on Lenin himself.”⁷⁹ By identifying in this way fascism’s roots on the Left, he sought to understand what was common to both political extremes and to distance himself from both of them. A central point of *Religion and the Modern State* was that it was futile to blame any one cause, whether fascism, democracy, capitalism, or communism, as the root of all evil.⁸⁰

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), the Austrian-born German politician and head of the National Socialist German Workers Party (popularly known as the Nazi Party), was a Great War veteran (like Mussolini). The Nazi Party grew out of discontented groups during the final years of the war. Hitler joined in 1920. It stressed German racial purity and the failure of democracy and laissez-faire capitalism. Just after the November 1932 Rome conference that Dawson had attended Hitler rose to the position of Chancellor.

To Dawson, the problem of Nazi power, the problem of *power* in general, was a crucial one in the interwar years. This power was both a religious and a political problem. Why religious? In 1943 he wrote:

It is not possible to face the tremendous power drive of the new totalitarian parties by purely intellectual means, by argument and logic and philosophy, nor yet by ethical idealism, nor by a quietist withdrawal into the religious life, in the static sense. For Hitler, at any rate, is very conscious of the spiritual factor in social life, he returns to it again and again in *Mein Kampf*. All his early propaganda is based on the importance of faith and the power of a few men with intense convictions to overcome all obstacles and all material difficulties. The weakness of

Conservatism does not pretend to go beyond the social & political sphere. I do not mean to say that Conservatism is or ought to be indifferent to religion. On the contrary it has always maintained the vital importance of religion in national life & for that very reason it recognizes its own limits & the essential distinction of political from religious action” (5-6). STA, box 3, folder 38 “Conservatism.”

⁷⁹ Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, 8.

⁸⁰ However, in 1937 Dawson did take a stand against Communism in Spain. “The victory of Communism in Spain would be a victory for Communism in its most dangerous aspect, for it would not be a victory over capitalism, which is relatively unimportant in Spain, but over Catholicism, which is the very root of the Spanish tradition.” Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 129. Scott quoted from Christopher Dawson, “Spain and Europe,” *Catholic Times* [London], 12 March 1937. On the English Catholic response in general to the Spanish Civil War, see James Flint, “‘Must God Go Fascist?': English Catholic Opinion and the Spanish Civil War,” *Church History* LVI (1987).

Germany, he wrote, is not due to its lack of armaments, but its lack of arms is due to its spiritual weakness. And the secret of success was to be found not in material organisation, but in the recovery of spiritual power.⁸¹

Dawson finished his analysis of Hitler:

*But what was this spiritual power? Hitler was a prophet not of the power of the Spirit, but of the spirit of Power. He made his appeal to what he calls 'the psyche of the broad masses'—the instinctive emotional reactions of the crowd, which we call mass hysteria, but which is a good deal more than that. When once this dynamic power was released, it swept everything that stood in its path—the Weimar Republic, the Socialists, the Catholic Centre, the Catholic Corporative régime in Austria—and it has gone on sweeping things away ever since. It is like the French Revolution, which de Maistre described as 'a battering ram with twenty million wills behind it'; only the French Revolution appealed to rational principles and ideals, whereas the new revolution appeals to the will to power and nothing else [emphasis in the original].*⁸²

Dawson thought of religion as a *religious sense* concerned with the goal and meaning of life; no matter how vague, this sense found channels of expression in either supernatural belief or in “this-worldly” ideologies which rested on belief in axioms about the direction of human life. “In the past Western society could dispense with an official state-philosophy such as we find in Russia to-day, because European civilization and the European State equally possessed a religious foundation and based their social and political life on religious sanctions. A State which possesses an established church obviously does not have to create its own spiritual ideals or its own moral standards, for these things are already given in the church.” However, he continued, “the secularization of Western society brought with it not only a loss of religious unity and religious faith, but also the disappearance of those objective and moral standards and values which provided a spiritual basis for social and political life.”⁸³ He concluded:

Thus the political problems of the modern world are in the last resort religious. The rise of the new State may be regarded as the culmination of the process of secularization in Western history and the unification of our culture on a purely materialistic basis. But on the other hand it may equally be regarded as the result of a spiritual reaction against the materialism of nineteenth century bourgeois society: as an attempt to find some substitute for the lost religious foundations of society and to replace the utilitarian individualism of the liberal-capitalist State by a new spiritual community.

If the new State threatens the freedom of the Church and the individual conscience, it is because it is itself taking on some of the features of a church and is no longer content to confine itself to the outside of life—the sphere of the policeman and the lawyer. It claims the whole of life and thus becomes a competitor with the Church on its own ground.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Christopher Dawson, *The Power of the Spirit* (Sword of the Spirit Pamphlet) (London: 1943), 8-9. This obscure pamphlet is available in the British Library.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 9. See also: Christopher Dawson, "Hitler's 'Mein Kampf'," *Tablet* 25 March 1939.

⁸³ Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, 43-44.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

The secularization of the West was the attempted separation of religion from the public sphere. This attempt had created a cultural void in which arose the new totalitarian ideologies that claimed the “whole of life.” The person for whom real religion was simply a “moral and emotional stimulus”⁸⁵ was at a disadvantage, then, because he or she could not help feeling that, no matter how much mistaken, the ideologies had “stolen the show” by aiming at the “subordination of material things and selfish interests to a higher end” and by “asserting the need for the reconsecration of social life.”⁸⁶

Mere Words Spoken into the Void? On Why Dawson Avoided Meetings

How did Dawson respond practically to the dramatic political situation of the late 1930s? As the sense of crisis deepened after 1938 he became involved in a discussion group called the Moot (active 1938-1947). This was a group of leading minds organized by the missionary and author J. H. Oldham⁸⁷ to discuss educational and social reconstruction. Participants included the theologian John Baillie, who later encouraged Dawson’s Gifford Lectures to successful completion; T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), who published his *Idea of a Christian Society* in 1939 and his *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* in 1948—the latter book drawing from his work within the Moot; the journalist and author John Middleton Murry (1889-1957); Adolf Löwe (1893-1995), a German, Jewish refugee sociologist and economist; and Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), the Hungarian-born Jewish sociologist who, like Löwe, was forced out of his academic position at Frankfurt. Mannheim’s *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* (1940) had appeared in German in 1935. His thought provided a primary stimulus to the group, and when he died in 1947 the Moot ended.⁸⁸

According to the attendance list, Dawson attended only three meetings: April 1938, January 1941, and August 1941. Eliot was at all three of those meetings, and Mannheim the last two.⁸⁹ The archive for the Moot contains papers Dawson wrote on

⁸⁵ Ibid., 149.

⁸⁶ ———, *Beyond Politics*, 105-106.

⁸⁷ Joseph Houldsworth Oldham (1874-1969) was born in Bombay, India; his father was Lieutenant-Colonel George Wingate Oldham; his most influential book was *Christianity and the Race Problem* (1924); in 1921 he became the secretary of the International Missionary Council; see the entry by Kathleen Bliss and revised by Andrew Porter, ODNB (accessed 4 May 2009). “Moot” is an Old English word meaning an assembly or meeting-point; OED (accessed 20 August 2009).

⁸⁸ Keith Clements, *Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J. H. Oldham* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), chapter XVII.

⁸⁹ Attendance List, E-JHOP, box 12, folder 1.

“Freedom and Vocation”⁹⁰ and a response to the theme “planning for freedom,” which had been introduced in a discussion paper by Mannheim in January 1939. These two papers were the foundations of two chapters in Dawson’s *The Judgment of the Nations* (1942). Mannheim argued for a “third way” between totalitarianism and *laissez-faire* in a democratic state which would plan much of society and culture.⁹¹ In his response paper, Dawson argued against this position: “The organization of culture means bringing it into the service of social ends and hence of the state.” Furthermore, “the remoulding of human nature is a task that far transcends politics, and...if the state is entrusted with this task it will inevitably destroy human freedom in a more fundamental way than even the totalitarian states have yet attempted to do.” Dawson stood firmly against any attempt by the state to sacrifice the liberties and spiritual values of the older type of culture for the sake of power and immediate success.⁹² In *Beyond Politics*, he wrote of the importance of the culture *below* state politics. “But what has always given the English system its unique strength and social solidity has been the existence of a social unity behind the monarchy and behind parliament, a unity of which they are the political organs, but which itself transcends politics. It is this unity which makes it possible for our party system to function on a basis of common understanding without dividing the nation into two hostile camps with mutually exclusive ideologies.”⁹³

In order to “organize” culture while safeguarding personal freedom, Dawson called for, rather vaguely, in his *Beyond Politics*, a *party* of culture, a voluntary organization for common ends based on a common “ideology.” This would be an “organization of national culture which would not be directly dependent on the State or on any political party....” This was necessary because, “What has been lacking hitherto is any satisfactory basis for common action....” At the present time in democratic countries the “realm of culture has become a no-man’s-land which is given up to anarchic individualism....” Dawson had in mind a non-political party of national culture which could “find room for everyone who is not committed to a totalitarian ideology and

⁹⁰ E-JHOP, box 14, folder 4.

⁹¹ See Matthew Grimley’s entry, ODNB (accessed 4 May 2009).

⁹² “Planning and Culture,” E-JHOP, box 14, folder 4, paragraphs 13, 19, and 20. In paragraph twenty he wrote: “The planning of culture cannot be undertaken in a dictatorial spirit, like a rearmament plan. Since it is a much higher and more difficult task than any economic organisation, it demands greater resources of powers of knowledge and understanding. It must in fact be undertaken in a really religious spirit.”

⁹³ Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, 14.

who is loyal to the national tradition and to national institutions and ideals.” He offered examples of what he meant: “There are obvious difficulties in the way of creating such an organization. Nevertheless there have been parties of ideas in the past, for instance, the Action Française and the Fabian Society, and though these aspired to direct political action in the last resort, I do not see why this should be the inevitable condition of their existence.”⁹⁴ A startling contrast! The Fabian Society was founded in 1884 and became the preeminent academic society in Britain during the Edwardian era. This intellectual socialist movement laid many of the foundations of the Labour Party. Four Fabians, Beatrice Webb (1858-1943), Sidney Webb (1859-1947), Graham Wallas (1858-1932), and George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) founded the London School of Economics in 1895. Like the Fabian Society, the Action Française was founded during the late nineteenth century (in 1898, during the Dreyfus Affair), and is still active today. Unlike the Fabian Society, it was a far-right, nationalist organization supporting monarchism and the restoration of Catholicism as the national religion. It made anti-republicanism and anti-Semitism respectable in intellectual circles. The principal ideologist of Action Française was Charles Maurras (1868-1952), a journalist and political thinker. From 1908, in the newspaper *Action française*, his articles attracted many young people and Catholics. However, the movement was condemned in 1926 by Pope Pius XI (though the condemnation was lifted in 1939 by Pope Pius XII). Dawson’s juxtaposition of these two movements was his way of focusing attention away from *ideological function* to *sociological function*: he had in mind a movement of ideas and cultural influence distinct from a political party.⁹⁵

Dawson’s idea of a party of culture may have been relevant to the discussions at the Moot, but he remained on the margins of the group. This was not only because of differences in ideas and other commitments, but because he seemed to be cautious about the whole idea of meetings and “group activities” in the first place. “There is

⁹⁴ Ibid., 24, 26, 27, 28, 55-56.

⁹⁵ The anti-Semitism of the Action Française would have been repugnant to Dawson. There is no known instance of any anti-Semitic statements made by him. In fact, in his *Making of Europe* (1932) he described how Christianity clearly derived out of the Jewish tradition—see Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity* (1932; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 34. At the 1932 Rome conference he forcefully argued against the racial interpretation of history, and in a 1959 lecture at Brandeis University called “On Jewish History” (and published as Dawson’s final article of his life in *Orbis* (Winter 1967), he wrote of the significance of Jewish culture in world history—see www.ewtn.com/library/HOMELIBR/DAWJEWS.TXT (accessed 18 August 2009).

also the other point we raised which may be of less importance,” Dawson wrote to Oldham, “but which is of even greater practical urgency; I mean this question of ‘meeting’, on which you rightly lay such stress, but which seems to me to be in practice stifled and overlaid by ‘meetings’.” He continued: “In other words, is not the great question for us to-day whether and how it is possible to avoid the absorption of personal relations by organized group activities. It is of course our old friend the question of Planning and Freedom, but it works differently in theory and practice, because the representations of the religious point of view, who in principle should be the defenders of personality, are in practice more completely committed to the supremacy of organization than are the representatives of the secular point of view.”⁹⁶ Dawson wanted to do something, to be part of a greater *action*. Therefore, his energies were devoted not so much to the Moot as to that “party of ideas” the Sword of the Spirit movement.

Into the Void with the Sword of the Spirit

Dawson received a letter dated 27 June 1938 from a private secretary of Cardinal Arthur Hinsley (1865-1943), the Archbishop of Westminster. “His Eminence the Cardinal is an admirer of your writings,” it said, “and wants to make your acquaintance.”⁹⁷ They apparently got on well, for after the shock of the fall of France in June 1940 Dawson was appointed by Hinsley to the editorship of the *Dublin Review*. He was also invited by the Cardinal to be Vice-President of a new movement the Cardinal launched in August called the Sword of the Spirit (SOS).

During the 1930s much of the Catholic press had supported Franco. Hinsley himself had privately supported him.⁹⁸ Therefore, he responded to the dangerous national predicament in the summer of 1940 by trying to counter the fascist image of

⁹⁶ Dawson to Oldham, 18 April 1942, E-JHOP, box 15, folder 80. He had expressed similar concerns in a letter to Oldham of 20 June 1939, U-JHOP, box 9, folder 2. In a 1942 conversation over dinner with his friend David Jones, Dawson told him that he (Dawson) found that Catholics, “in his experience, since he became a Catholic, were getting far more, not less, ‘institutional’ (in the bad sense) and mechanical, so to say. That the age of von Hugel, the ‘belief’ in the Holy Ghost, in the subtlety of where truth resides etc. seemed far away—and a belief in effecting things by organization and formulas etc. etc. (among Catholics) growing rather than lessening. In short, that ‘propaganda’ is universally dominant in the Church as outside it, and once you yield *interiorly* to the propagandist attitude you’re sunk.” Letter of David Jones to Harman Grisewood, 1 June 1942, in René Hague, ed., *Dai Greatcoat: A Self-Portrait of David Jones in His Letters* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980), 120 (emphasis in the original).

⁹⁷ Valentine Elwes to Dawson, 27 June 1938, STA, box 14, folder 169.

⁹⁸ Thomas Moloney, *Westminster, Whitehall and the Vatican: The Role of Cardinal Hinsley, 1935-43* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1985), chapter 3.

Catholics. He wanted to demonstrate that even if a “Latin bloc” of Catholic (and fascist) countries developed in Europe that British Catholics would remain patriotic. He had already used St. Paul’s phrase “the sword of the Spirit”⁹⁹ in an address broadcast by the BBC on 10 December 1939 about “the battle which goes on in the inmost hearts of men, of that spiritual conflict inside each man resulting in the triumph of good or of evil in the outward world.” “I am convinced,” he said, “that Britain has engaged in this war in the main for defence of the things of the spirit.”¹⁰⁰ In this way Hinsley emerged as a national religious war-leader. Though the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang (1864-1945), had signed a letter to *The Times* with Hinsley supporting Pope Pius XII’s “Five Peace Points” in December 1940, he did not take on a national role in the war effort. Some clerics remembered all too well the over-blown religious rhetoric used to support the Great War in 1914 and 1915.¹⁰¹ Hinsley did not hesitate, however, and strongly encouraged Catholics to support the government. When SOS was launched as a movement in August 1940 it was part of his campaign to state clearly that Catholicism and fascism were not synonymous. SOS was referred to as a “Crusade against Nazi Paganism” (in *The Times*) which attempted “to coordinate and intensify the efforts already being made by the Roman Catholic body in England to fit themselves by prayer, work, and study to contribute as much as they can to the national cause.”¹⁰² Dawson enthusiastically supported it from the start. Early in 1941 Hinsley wrote to Dawson: “I have just read your article ‘The Sword of the Spirit’ in the *Dublin*. It is excellent. I congratulate you, and I thank you heartily.” He continued: “You have my full confidence. I desire that you should be the leading spirit and directing light in the movement. Your vote should have a deciding influence at the meetings of the Executive.”¹⁰³

The Board of SOS, with Hinsley as President and Dawson as Vice-President, consisted of the legal scholar Richard O’Sullivan (1888-1963), KC, as Chairman, and Barbara Ward (1914-1981) and A. C. F. Beales (1905-1974) as Joint Honorary

⁹⁹ Ephesians 6.17.

¹⁰⁰ Cardinal Hinsley, “The Sword of the Spirit,” *Tablet* 16 December 1939, 705.

¹⁰¹ Stuart Mews, “The Sword of the Spirit: A Catholic Cultural Crusade of 1940,” in *The Church and War*, ed. W. J. Sheils (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 410-412. For the joint Letter to the Editor of *The Times*, see “Foundations of Peace,” signed by Cosmo Cantuar, A. Cardinal Hinsley, Walter H. Armstrong, and William Ebor, 21 December 1940, 5.

¹⁰² “A Crusade Against Nazi Paganism,” *Times* 22 July 1940, 2.

¹⁰³ Hinsley to Dawson, 16 January 1941, AAW, box “Sword of the Spirit, Hinsley 2/219 + Bo. 1/174,” folder “Correspondence Christopher Dawson/Hinsley.” Hinsley referred to Christopher Dawson, “The Sword of the Spirit,” *Dublin Review* (January 1941).

Secretaries. The wealthy convert Manya Harari (1905-1969), future co-founder of Harvill Press, although not a member of the Board, was a leading light of the movement.¹⁰⁴ Fr. Martin D'Arcy (1888-1976), Jesuit and theologian, was an advisor. Robert Speaight (1904-1976), an actor and literary scholar involved with SOS, described the movement as: "launched by Cardinal Hinsley, animated by Manya Harari, put into operation by Barbara Ward, and intellectually nourished by Christopher Dawson.... Faith was strong in both these remarkable women and Christopher Dawson leaned heavily upon them, as they—for different reasons—leaned upon him."¹⁰⁵ Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) was closely linked as well, and the movement quickly made contact with various national groups exiled in Britain.¹⁰⁶ SOS pamphlets were written by Dawson, and the Ministry of Information moved in quickly to assist financially with the early pamphlets written in August 1940. The Ministry printed such publications as "Nazism and the International Order" and "The Pope and the War," circulating the fortnightly number of 400,000 through Catholic organizations.¹⁰⁷

Dawson wrote in August for *The Tablet*: "Our great need is unity. ...The favourite method of causing division and strife is the exploitation of the 'ideological' conflict between Left and Right, which may be extended to cover almost every shade of opinion. If this conflict is developed in an extreme form, it produces a situation like that of the Spanish civil war, in which the nation is divided into two hostile camps, with no common ground between them." How can Catholics contribute to the national resistance and to national unity? he asked. "There must surely be some relation between the Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity, and the social faith, hope and charity which hold societies together and preserve them from the social vices of faction and treachery and defeatism." For politics is not enough, he said. "If political Parties are the only forces in a nation, they inevitably lead to division and strife. They

¹⁰⁴ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 140.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Speaight, *The Property Basket: Recollections of a Divided Life* (London: Collins & Harvill, 1970), 218-219. Harari provided European contacts and was described by Scott as: "A White Russian émigré, half-Jewish by birth and married to an Egyptian financier, she had a certain air of almost Eastern mystery with her long cigarette holder and romantic black cloak which she often wore." Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 140.

¹⁰⁶ For example, the minutes of a meeting of the executive committee on 28 August 1941 mentioned that on a 6 August meeting, representatives from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, France, and the Netherlands attended. See AAW, box "Sword of the Spirit, Executive Minutes, 1940-41," folder "Minutes, 1941-42"; see also Moloney, *Westminster, Whitehall and the Vatican: The Role of Cardinal Hinsley, 1935-43*, 190, 195.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

must be supplemented by another element, which is that of religion.” “Thus,” he concluded, “Catholics can make a vital contribution to the cause of national unity, not by their political action or by launching Catholic political programmes, but by strengthening the moral basis of unity which underlies political action.”¹⁰⁸

For Dawson, SOS was founded as “a spiritual movement against a spiritual evil. It is a crusade against totalitarianism, not on the political plane, but on the spiritual plane, a crusade to defend man against the anti-human forces that are striving to dominate the world.”¹⁰⁹ Those forces included “propaganda,” especially coming from the totalitarian states. (That was why *study* was important—to defend oneself intellectually.) Such propaganda was an “organization for the creation and control of mass opinion in the interests of power without regard for moral consideration.”¹¹⁰ Dawson saw SOS as countering two extremes. On one hand, there was the realism of the militarist who recognized the problem of Hitler but who viewed resistance as simply making munitions and bombing Germany. This kind of person “believes that it is possible by force alone to destroy the evils that threaten our civilisation.” On the other hand, Christians, “who presumably realize the importance of spiritual things, do not always recognise that they have any bearing on the present crisis.” Wars come and wars go, these pious idealists think, so the great thing is to cultivate the religious life and go to church as much as possible. “We cannot agree with either, for, though we believe that the spiritual war is different and far more important than the war with Germany, we also believe that there is a relation between them and that the war is an external manifestation of a spiritual disorder, in a different sense to that in which all wars are.” The “demonic” power of National Socialism was due to the fact that Christians retreated and abdicated in and after 1933.¹¹¹ “In such a work,” he wrote, “it is useless to look for quick results, for our present danger is the result of literally centuries of neglect, during which culture has been secularized and religion gradually pushed out of public life in the private sanctuary of the individual conscience.” He continued: “But with the coming of totalitarianism even this last refuge [the individual conscience] is no longer secure. The new powers demand everything...”¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Dawson, “The Sword of the Spirit,” *Tablet* 31 August 1940, 172. This was reprinted from the second bulletin of the SOS.

¹⁰⁹ Dawson, *The Power of the Spirit* (Sword of the Spirit Pamphlet), 3.

¹¹⁰ Christopher Dawson, “Propaganda,” *Tablet* 5 October 1940, 265.

¹¹¹ Dawson, *The Power of the Spirit* (Sword of the Spirit Pamphlet), 6.

¹¹² ———, “Propaganda,” 266.

Once again, Dawson blamed the separation between religion and culture (secularization) as a leading factor in the contemporary situation. Christian disunity since the Reformation had created a “neutral territory which gradually expanded till it came to include almost the whole of social life.” The wars of religion led to the eventual exclusion of religion to a private world.¹¹³ For a Christian “who believes in the existence of a divine and universal society all such ideas are blasphemy against Christ the King,” he wrote.¹¹⁴ In this way, he blamed Christian disunity for the division between religion and culture that led to secularization in *The Judgment of the Nations* (1942).

However, he also included in that book an entire chapter on “The Return to Christian Unity.” The greatest step toward Christian unity was an internal and a spiritual one, he wrote. One must purge from the mind the lower motives which contaminate faith. “For in the vast majority of cases the sin of schism does not arise from a conscious intention to separate oneself from the true Church, but from allowing the mind to become so occupied and clouded by instinctive enmities or oppositions that we can no longer see spiritual issues clearly, and our religious attitude becomes determined by forces that are not religious at all.” In the history of the Church, he wrote, heresy and schism had often derived their main impulse from sociological causes.¹¹⁵

Towards an interest in greater Christian unity as part of the war effort, the Sword of the Spirit was the first Catholic attempt to found an ecumenical movement in England. Ecumenism lay close to Dawson’s concerns, and he was personally a bridge between Anglicans and Catholics during the war: “I saw...Dawson a few days ago,” David Jones wrote to a friend in June 1942, and “had dinner with him in...the ‘Mausoleum’ in Queen’s Gate Terrace—I must say it is a gloomy place. [Dawson] had just had tea with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London and Arthur Cardinal Hinsley, and Miss B[arbara] Ward—what an astonishing party.”¹¹⁶ Dawson was also close friends with George Bell (1883-1958), the Anglican bishop of Chichester, who, apparently, held up Dawson’s 1942 book *The Judgment of the*

¹¹³ ———, *The Judgment of the Nations*, 104.

¹¹⁴ ———, *Religion and the Modern State*.

¹¹⁵ ———, *The Judgment of the Nations*, 178-180.

¹¹⁶ Jones to Harman Grisewood, 1 June 1942, in Hague, ed., *Dai Greatcoat: A Self-Portrait of David Jones in His Letters*, 119. The Archbishop of Canterbury from April 1942 to October 1944 was William Temple (1881-1944). The Bishop of London 1939-1945 was Geoffrey Fisher (1887-1972), who succeeded Temple as Archbishop of Canterbury.

Nations during a speech in the House of Lords and recommended everyone to read it.¹¹⁷

Ecumenism was very evident at the two public meetings of 10 and 11 May 1941 held at the Stoll Theatre in London under the auspices of SOS. The meetings, presided over by the archbishops of Westminster and Canterbury,¹¹⁸ were an immense success and aroused considerable enthusiasm.¹¹⁹ The advertisement for the meetings indicated the topics: “A Christian International Order” and “A Christian Order for Britain.” Speakers included Christopher Dawson, Barbara Ward, George Bell, Martin D’Arcy, and the Acting Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council.¹²⁰ T. S. Eliot had been invited to speak. In a letter to Beales he explained that he could not attend but said: “I feel honoured by the invitation to join such a distinguished company: also I have a warm desire to support anything promoted by Christopher Dawson, with whose views I am in cordial sympathy.”¹²¹ The list of “platform guests” included Anglican bishops (e.g., of London), peers (e.g., Lord Perth), Catholic ecclesiastical heads (e.g., the Abbot of Downside), knights (e.g., Sir Francis Younghusband), members of Parliament (e.g., Arthur Evans), headmasters, heads of colleges, foreign church representatives, editors, representatives from France, and representatives of societies and institutions (e.g., Y.M.C.A. and Catholic Social Action).¹²² It was recorded that on 10 May (Saturday) the entire theatre was full of people (2,200) and over five hundred were turned away.¹²³ On 11 May the theatre was not quite full, possibly due to the most destructive night-time attack by the *Luftwaffe* in which three thousand Londoners were killed or wounded and the House of Commons and Lambeth Palace

¹¹⁷ Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 148. Bell attacked, in Parliament (9 February 1944), the British policy of obliteration bombing of German cities. He was supported by Lang but not by Temple—see entry by Alan Wilkinson, “Lang, (William) Cosmo Gordon,” ODNB (accessed 17 August 2009). Bell’s heroic stance may have partly cost him Canterbury’s archbishopric. One wonders if he and Dawson discussed the British bombing policy—perhaps further research in Bell’s papers would reveal something in this direction.

¹¹⁸ The Archbishop of Canterbury at this time (1928-1942) was (William) Cosmo Gordon Lang (1864-1945).

¹¹⁹ Mews, “The Sword of the Spirit: A Catholic Cultural Crusade of 1940,” 424.

¹²⁰ “Two Public Meetings” advertisement, AAW, unsorted box called “Sword, Stoll Meetings.”

¹²¹ Eliot to Beales, 5 April 1941, AAW, unsorted box called “Sword, Stoll Meetings.” Eliot had admired Dawson’s work for some time. He wrote to the historian in 1929: “I have recently read some of your work and have had it in my mind some little time to write to you to express my interest. ...the *Criterion* ought to publish some essay by you and I should be very grateful if you would write to me and make some suggestion.” Eliot to Dawson, STA, box 14, folder 120.

¹²² “List of Platform Guests,” AAW, unsorted box called “Sword, Stoll Meetings.”

¹²³ “Report on the Actual Meetings,” AAW, unsorted box called “Sword, Stoll Meetings, Organisation, 2.”

directly hit. This was the final major Blitz attack on London before the German squadrons were shifted east in preparation for the attack on Russia.¹²⁴

In the souvenir program of the Stoll meetings was published a short piece by Dawson called "The Idea of Christendom." He wrote that:

In spite of the amount of study that has been devoted in recent years to the social doctrine of the Papal Encyclicals, comparatively little attention has been given to their teaching on Christian civilisation. Nevertheless it runs through the whole series of Encyclicals from 1878 to the present day, and it is impossible to understand their teaching on international order without it. It is based on the idea that Europe is essentially a society of Christian peoples or nations—a society which derives its unity not from race or economic interest but from spiritual community, and that it is only by a restoration of this spiritual foundation that European order can be restored.¹²⁵

The success of the Stoll meetings opened up the possibility of many non-Catholic members joining SOS. However, the Catholic hierarchy grew nervous over Hinsley's promise (at the meeting) of further ecumenical cooperation and joint recitation of the Lord's Prayer. Others worried that leadership of SOS would pass out of Catholic hands. Therefore, "At the first annual meeting on 9 August 1941 Hinsley with great regret and some embarrassment announced that non-catholics were only eligible for associate membership in the Sword of the Spirit and had no voting rights. A parallel non-catholic movement was set up under the title 'Religion and Life'...."¹²⁶ Hierarchical division, theological controversy over ecumenism, the lack of structural organization within SOS, Hinsley's death in 1943, and the passing of an immediate threat of German invasion of Britain contributed to the decline of the movement after only three years.

"We have seen that the divisions of Christendom had their main source in social conflicts," Dawson wrote in 1942. "Is it not possible to reverse the process and to find in common social action a way of return to a Christian social unity?"¹²⁷ He thought so. His involvement in SOS arose from that belief and from war-propaganda needs. It also fit into his larger concern to fight totalitarian ideology on the cultural front. The breakdown of the relation between religion and culture, he thought, had contributed to the spiritual and psychological void into which had rushed the totalitarian ideologies

¹²⁴ Moloney, *Westminster, Whitehall and the Vatican: The Role of Cardinal Hinsley, 1935-43*, 192.

¹²⁵ "An Agreed Christian Order," souvenir programme of the public meetings at Stoll Theatre, AAW, unsorted box called "Sword, Stoll Meetings, Organisation, 2." He wrote elsewhere: "For what we must look for is not the alliance of the temporal power, as in the old Christendom, but a reordering of all the elements of human life and civilization by the power of the Spirit: the birth of a true community which is neither an inorganic mass of individuals nor a mechanized organization of power, but a living spiritual order." Dawson, "The Sword of the Spirit," 11.

¹²⁶ Mews, "The Sword of the Spirit: A Catholic Cultural Crusade of 1940," 426-427.

¹²⁷ Dawson, *The Judgment of the Nations*, 183.

that sought to unite life on the basis of a “secular religion.” Modern Christianity had to “become communal and break down the old barriers that separated religion from life,” Dawson argued. Far from creating a new theocracy,¹²⁸ far from countering secular religion (the ideologies) with a new form of Christian “political religion,”¹²⁹ far from creating programs for renewing society,¹³⁰ “The Church’s task is not to become a competitor with the State in its social action but to find new social means of expression for its spiritual action. The Church remains what she has always been, the organ of the Divine Word and the channel of Divine Grace. It is her mission to transform the world by bringing every side of human existence and every human activity into contact with the sources of supernatural life.”¹³¹ The Church’s mission, as Dawson saw it, was to unite men by what is highest (the fellowship of the Holy Spirit), not by what are lowest common factors, such as class interest or physical unity of blood and race. Whence comes the power to unite people and affect culture? Not from the spirit of Power so evident in interwar politics, Dawson asserted in 1943, but

¹²⁸ “Wherever the Church has seemed to dominate the world politically and achieves a victory within the secular sphere, she has had to pay for it in a double measure of temporal and spiritual misfortune. Thus the triumph of the Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire was followed first by the loss of the East to Islam and then by the schism with the West. The mediaeval attempt to create a Christian theocracy was followed by the Reformation and the destruction of the religious unity of Western Europe, while the attempt that was made both by the Puritans and by the monarchies of the Counter Reformation to dragoon society into orthodoxy and piety was followed by the incredulity and anticlericalism of the eighteenth century and the secularisation of European culture.” ———, *Religion and the Modern State*, 120-121.

¹²⁹ “It is notorious that ecclesiastics often make the most unscrupulous politicians, as we see in the case of Wolsey, Richelieu, Mazarin, and Alberoni, and in the same way the political parties which adopt religious programmes and claim to represent the cause of God, like the thirteenth century Guelfs, the Holy League in the sixteenth century and the Covenanters and Puritans in the seventeenth, have always distinguished themselves by their fanaticism and violence: in fact by a general lack of all the political virtues. Political religion is an offence alike to religion and to politics: it takes from Caesar what belongs to him of right and fills the temple with the noise and dust of the market place. The only really and specifically Christian politics are the politics of the world to come, and they transform social life not by competing with secular politics on their own ground but by altering the focus of human thought and opening the closed house of secular culture to the free light and air of a larger and more real world.” *Ibid.*, 122-123.

¹³⁰ “In a sense it is quite true to say that all our troubles are due to the neglect of Christian teaching and that Christianity is the remedy for our social as well as our individual evils. But it is not like a patent medicine that is warranted to cure all diseases. It offers no short cuts to economic prosperity or social stability.” “The true social function of religion is not to busy itself with economic or political reforms, but to save civilization from itself by revealing to men the true end of life and the true nature of reality.” *Ibid.*, 121, 125. “The greatest service the Church can render to western civilization at the present time [1939] is to keep her own inheritance intact and not to allow her witness to be obscured by letting herself be used as the instrument of secular powers and politics.” Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, 21.

¹³¹ Dawson, “Church, State and Community,” 910.

from the power of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, God Himself. And Christians possessed the gift of His power. Only their lack of faith and generosity inhibited it.¹³²

The significance of Dawson's war-time work for *The Dublin Review*, the *Sword of the Spirit*, and his publication of *The Judgment of the Nations*, was to put him at the center of the Christian response to the Second World War in Britain. The First World War had raised questions about "progress" and "civilization" and "decline" and "democracy" and "capitalism"; the Second World War returned attention to the value of democracy (as in the thought of Jacques Maritain) and raised questions about the relationship between Christianity, culture, and the state for Dawson and other Catholics. With the decline of the political power of the Catholic Church in Europe, what realistic role could it play in society? Before 1940 the typical European Catholic praised the states which claimed explicit Catholic legitimation, such as Austria, Portugal, and Spain. The *Fédération Nationale Catholique* in France was a good example of mass support for the older ideal of the "Catholic social order." This ideal partly underpinned the enthusiasm many French Catholics later gave to Vichy France (1940-1945), which courted the Church in the interest of "moral regeneration."¹³³ Though there had been voices contrary to the "Catholic state" idea in the interwar years, such as Luigi Sturzo, the Italian Christian Democrat who had been exiled to London in 1924, it was not until *after* 1940 that the typical European Catholic would be a democrat.¹³⁴ In Britain, Dawson played an important role in this transformation.

Chapter two of this thesis demonstrated that though sharing in some of the medievalist atmosphere of the interwar years, Dawson did not look upon medieval Europe as Belloc and others did for a definite model of Christian society to be aimed for. Despite his hostility to the Communist forces during the Spanish Civil War, he ultimately disagreed with "Catholic imperialists" who sought to defend Christian culture through national aggrandizement.¹³⁵ Thus, as Joan Keating's work has shown, Dawson's most important achievement during the Second World War was

¹³² ———, *The Power of the Spirit* (Sword of the Spirit Pamphlet), 10.

¹³³ James F. McMillan, "Catholicism and Nationalism in France: The Case of the *Fédération Nationale Catholique*, 1924-39," in *Catholicism in Britain and France Since 1789*, ed. Frank Tallett and Nicholas Atkin (London: Hambledon, 1996).

¹³⁴ Joan E. Keating, "Discrediting the 'Catholic State': British Catholics and the Fall of France," in *Catholicism in Britain and France Since 1789*, ed. Frank Tallett and Nicholas Atkin (London: Hambledon, 1996), 27-28; Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity: 1920-1990*, 3rd ed. (1986; London: SCM, 1991), 372.

¹³⁵ Joan E. Keating, "Roman Catholics, Christian Democracy and the British Labour Movement, 1910-1960" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Manchester, 1992), 123-124.

“suggesting to British Catholics that the way ahead was by accepting a circumscribed role in mainstream British life.” He sought to justify Catholic action in the world, with the Church as a dynamic moral and social force, not to justify a certain political order.¹³⁶ “He was certainly no fan of the confessional state. ...Dawson’s importance lies in his championing of democracy.” His role was to underpin the voice of the See of Westminster with a historical analysis to wean Catholics away from the confessional state idea. “Dawson was suggesting a role for the Church in a non-theocratic Britain.”¹³⁷ Dawson’s focus on the distinct *otherness* of the Church suggested choice and the possibility of options in politics for Catholics. This was a major contribution to Catholics during the 1930s and 1940s.¹³⁸

Political developments during the interwar years brought out the Christian and the national and even the polemical Dawson in ways that his temperament and ordinary scholarly interests did not. But he approached politics only *after* having immersed himself in other subjects. He proceeded from cultural studies *to* political studies. He thought “beyond politics.” The modern dilemma was firstly a cultural dilemma. Only in the spheres of culture and religion could human beings possess spiritual, intellectual, and psychological certainties and personal meanings. For him, only by acknowledging the distinctness of those spheres could politics be free to focus on truly political questions and avoid the confusion and amalgamation of political and religious categories which could end nowhere but in totalitarianism.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 128, 131.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 152.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 151. Dawson in 1933: “Christianity is bound to protest against any social system which claims the whole of man and sets itself up as the final end of human action, for it asserts that man’s essential nature transcends all political and economic forms.” Christopher Dawson, “Man and Civilization,” in *The Catholic Mind Through Fifty Years 1903-1953*, ed. Benjamin L. Masse (New York: America, 1953), 271. This radio address appeared in the *Listener*, August, 1933, and in the *Catholic Mind*, 22 November 1933, 435-440. Dawson in 1934: “Thus the essence of Catholic sociology is its political relativity. A Christian state is not marked by any particular institutions, it is a state that recognizes Christian ends, and consequently recognizes its own limitations.” Christopher Dawson, “The Real Issue,” *Colosseum* I (September 1934): 24.

Conclusion: Thinking Historically with Christopher Dawson

"If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake... clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try, in outline at least to determine what it is, and of which of the sciences or capacities it is the object."—Aristotle (384-322 BC)¹

The task of this Conclusion is to summarize the elements of Dawson's logic as a way of illustrating his cultural mind and what his fundamental contributions to historical thinking have been and continue to be. These elements are grouped in five categories: (1) "intellectual architecture," (2) "boundary thinking," (3) "intellectual asceticism," (4) "intellectual bridges," and (5) "questions and answers."

Intellectual Architecture: Louis A. Schuster, Marianist Brother at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas, recalled visiting Christopher Dawson during the early 1950s at his home near Oxford. In Dawson's study he remembered:

spending most of the afternoon crawling with him on hands and knees up and down and across the rows of books on the floor. I think each row represented a different century. Books on architecture, painting, sculpture, literature, economics, philosophy, theology, history—seemingly juxtaposed at random. He opened and fondled quite a few explaining how valuable each one was because of a certain well written chapter, or this insight, or this interesting new primary evidence stuck away in a footnote on page 391 etc.

I remember squatting across the centuries from him as he pulled up another book and asked me whether I had noticed the difference between the baroque churches in Spain and those in Austria and by implication the cultural differences at work in either case. He insisted I go to Austria on my next vacation and visit especially this and that. And so it went all afternoon until my head was spinning and popping lights like a pinball machine.²

This passage reveals an intriguing picture of Dawson the historian. He thought in terms of long chronological eras but also *horizontally* within those eras in terms of the widest possible variety of perspectives. Every discipline could seemingly tell him something about human life in the past. "Christopher Dawson may be seen as

¹ Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), Bk. 1, par. 2.

² Schuster to Christina Scott, 25 December 1984, STAC, box 1, folder "General Correspondence 1985-2000."

discovering the possibilities for unity among the many intellectual disciplines of our time,” one commentator wrote.³

His belief in the unity of human life was the foundation for his confidence in the possibility of the harmonious operation of the disciplines in pursuit of a common object (the history of culture—see Appendix C). Confronted with “crisis” after the Great War, Dawson built on his unusual historical interests during his Oxford days to take a different view of the historical discipline than the common political model. From the publication of his first book in 1928 he sought to study the past “not as an inorganic mass of isolated events, but as the manifestation of the growth and mutual interaction of living cultural wholes.”⁴ To study “living cultural wholes” required the help of many disciplines because “culture,” as he defined it as a “common way of life,” was a broad phenomenon. In that first book he utilized archeology, ancient history, anthropology, and ethnology. For other historical periods, he drew from still more disciplines, such as sociology, art history, and theology.

This thesis has shown how a belief in *holism* was typical of many thinkers in Britain during the 1920s. Thus it was crucially important that Dawson was not born ten years later than he was, for his intellectual formation would have been totally different. As fate would have it, his mature “intellectual architecture” was largely complete *before* the distractions of the European political ideologies rose to dominance during the 1930s and his attention shifted to more immediate concerns.

Chapter one demonstrated that an important image of Dawson was his pursuit of the “whole pattern of the past” through a “pluralist” methodology which attempted to give simultaneous recognition to many perspectives on the past through the various disciplines. Subsequent chapters have made this image real. Dawson indeed adopted a way of looking at reality that attempted to keep in mind all the factors. “That is the really essential quality of Mr. Dawson’s work: an opening up of frontiers, a broad integration of isolated disciplines in the crucible of a humane and passionate mind, an unfreezing of cold abstractions into the human realities: love, enthusiasm, faith, anger, death. It is no mean achievement; and we can all, scholars and amateurs, sceptics and

³ James Ambrose Raftis, “The Development of Christopher Dawson’s Thought,” *Chesterton Review* IX (1983): 132.

⁴ Christopher Dawson, *The Age of the Gods: A Study in the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient East* (London: John Murray, 1928), v.

believers, derive great benefit from it," wrote one reviewer.⁵ If reality "cannot be fully understood if one fails to use all the possibilities made available by reason, or if one attempts to impose one's prejudices on reality...",⁶ then Dawson surely tried to expand the horizons of reason in his critique of empirical history. That critique opened up new historical sources that helped to undermine some of the historiographical prejudices of his day which had sidelined religion in "ecclesiastical history" and often ignored sociology altogether.

A central feature of his intellectual architecture was his conceptualization of Weberian-like "ideal-types," such as the model FWP (Folk-Work-Place) which he drew from the Sociological Society, his conception of progress, or the use of Prophet, Priest, and King in his functional account of religion vis-à-vis culture. These concepts served as reference-patterns as he attempted to navigate the vast sea of empirical facts. But his limited theory-construction was never decided *a priori*. And his historical concepts were not ends in themselves. Like Weber, he did not try to create a "complete" and hence deductive science of history.⁷ Definitive historical concepts were not ends to Dawson but means or tools for use in revealing concrete and individual historical and cultural phenomena from distinct viewpoints. In this way, Dawson's historical concepts uncovered new empirical data (literary, artistic, sociological, mystical) or changed perception and evaluation of familiar data (e.g., the significance of world religious texts in their relation to human culture). In these ways he added to the stock of historical reality available to historians of his day and ours.

Dawson's interdisciplinary thinking and historical concepts were tools at the service of *historical understanding*. When historians lacked an adequate intellectual architecture, when they failed to consider all of the possibilities made available by reason in the pursuit of historical understanding, their one-sided explanations crumpled, he thought. For example, in a critique of Isaiah Berlin's *Historical Inevitability* (1954), with words peculiarly poignant today, he warned against reacting so far against extreme moral relativism as to fall into interpreting history as a series of straightforward moral conflicts. Such an interpretation had been "the bane of both history and politics in modern times." He continued:

⁵ Peter Morris Green, "God and History," review of *The Dynamics of World History*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 December 1957, 782.

⁶ Marco Bregni, "The Facts Speak for Themselves," *Traces* XI, no. 4 (2009): 19.

⁷ Max Weber, "'Objectivity' in the Social Sciences and Social Policy," in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences: A Reader*, ed. Maurice Natanson (New York: Random House, 1963), 407, 412-413.

One of the chief sources of error in English and American foreign policy has been the overrighteousness of public opinion and of the politicians who served it; so much so that unfriendly critics have often seen our moral indignation as an expression of the Machiavellian hypocrisy of the Anglo-Saxons! And we must recognize that this tendency to oversimplify history and politics in moral terms has its source in the one-sided moralism of the English and American historians of the last century. No doubt this is better than the one-sided *immoralism* of the totalitarian historians. But the true historian seeks to avoid both extremes. Although he is not a scientist in the strict sense of the word, he shares the same ideal of a patient and impartial investigation of the phenomena that lie within his field of study.⁸

Dawson often attacked explanatory oversimplifications. For example, drawing from his analysis of social structures in terms of I/FWP (Ideas/Folk-Work-Place), he criticized Hegelianism and later strands of Liberal idealism which believed in an absolute Law of Progress—overly exaggerating the thought element (I). Nazism exaggerated Folk against other factors of cultural development. For Marx, the mode of production in material life (W) determined the character of the social, political, and spiritual processes in life. All forms of nationalism exaggerated place (P). “The fact is that all ‘simple’ explanations are unsatisfactory and irreconcilable with scientific sociology. It is impossible either to...deduce social phenomena exclusively from material or spiritual ones,” he wrote. “As Pareto has shown, the essential requirement of sociological method is to abandon the idea of a one-sided relation of causal dependence between the different factors and view the social process as the result of a complex series of interdependent factors. Material environment, social organization and spiritual culture all help to condition social phenomena, and we cannot explain the social process by one of them alone, and still less explain one of the three as the cause and origin of the other two.”⁹

Dawson criticized simplified religious theories as well: “Writers on primitive religion have continually gone astray through their attempts to reduce the spiritual world of the primitive to a single principle, to find a single cause from which the whole development may be explained and rendered intelligible. Thus Tylor finds the key in the belief in ghosts, Durkheim in the theory of an impersonal *mana* which is the exteriorisation of the collective mind, and Frazer in the technique of magic. But in

⁸ Christopher Dawson, review of *Historical Inevitability*, *Harvard Law Review* LXX (1957): 587-588.

⁹ ———, “Sociology as a Science,” in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1956; Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002), 25-27, 28. Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) was an Italian industrialist, sociologist, economist, philosopher, and author of, for example, *Tratto di sociologia generale* (1916).

reality there is no single aspect of primitive religion that can be isolated and regarded as the origin of all the rest.”¹⁰

Boundary Thinking: Avoiding oversimplifications required sensitivity to the distinctions and boundaries between disciplines. This type of “boundary thinking” was constantly implicit or obvious in Dawson’s interwar writings, such as in *Progress and Religion* (1929) when he wrote about the idea of Progress from several disciplinary viewpoints, chapter by chapter. In “Sociology as a Science” (1934) he worked out a schema correlating sociology with history and theology.¹¹ In a letter to J. H. Oldham he complained of the tendency for the practitioners of one discipline to “regard their own methods as complete and exhaustive....” Such totalizing claims made cooperation between kindred sciences impossible. “Thus if we exclude from the start the theologian’s claim to study eternal super-temporal truths and values, we are denying the basic conditions of his thinking, in fact denying the existence of theology, so that there is no place left for any co-operation. I cannot myself see why the sociologist should not admit in principle the existence of elements which cannot be resolved in purely sociological terms, though he naturally claims to extend the area of sociological explanation to its furthest possible limits.”¹² He accused Émile Durkheim, for example, of explaining religion solely in terms of society—thus identifying them. “This is not a scientific explanation, but an amalgamation of religion and society by means of an illegitimate substitution of one category for another.”¹³ Those sociologists who sought to go beyond studying actual societies to aim at the reconstruction of society on the basis of a new religious ideal, such as the American sociologist Charles Ellwood (1873-1946) in *The Reconstruction of Religion* (1922), were almost uniformly unsuccessful. Their work, he thought, was “vitiated by

¹⁰ ———, *Christianity and the New Age* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1931), 37. T. S. Eliot, much influenced by Dawson, described such simplification as a form of *provincialism*, “a distortion of values, the exclusion of some, the exaggeration of others, which spring, not from lack of a wide geographical perambulation, but from applying standards acquired within a limited area, to the whole of human experience; which confounds the contingent with the essential, the ephemeral with the permanent.” See: T. S. Eliot, *What is a Classic?* (London: Faber & Faber, 1945), 30.

¹¹ Christopher Dawson, “Sociology as a Science,” in *Science Today: The Scientific Outlook on World Problems Explained by Leading Exponents of Modern Scientific Thought*, ed. J. Arthur Thomson and J. G. Crowther (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1934).

¹² Dawson to Oldham, no date, E-JHOP, box 9, folder 3. The letter, labeled “Confidential,” was likely written around 1940, based on its archival context.

¹³ Dawson, “Sociology as a Science,” 27.

an inherent confusion of method”¹⁴ that failed to recognize that different objects required different methods.

Such illegitimate disciplinary border-crossings resulted from a “naïve confusion of thought,” he wrote. “All the spiritual activities that appear in culture—religion, philosophy and science possess their own formal principle. They are not mere functions of society, but have their own ends, which in a real sense transcend the social category. The sociologist, no doubt, is justified in studying a religious belief in its influence on society, but the theologian does not judge his belief or theory in terms of social value, but in terms of religious truth.”¹⁵ He wrote elsewhere that, “the aspects of reality that are revealed in religion, philosophy, and art may be no less true and no less ultimate than the knowledge that is derived from physical science. Only their method of approach is different; for they conceive reality in terms of substance, quality, and value, whereas science views the world exclusively in terms of quantitative relations.”¹⁶ In this way Dawson was concerned to determine the right method of approach, the appropriate pathway of knowledge, in relation to the object to be known.

This boundary thinking concerning disciplines of knowledge translated into his views on the real world. “It is the great danger of social idealism that it tends to confuse religious and political categories,” he wrote.¹⁷ For example, in a lecture on “Conservatism” he praised the tradition of conservative thought and politics (within which he identified Samuel Johnson, Lord Shaftesbury, Joseph de Maistre, and Prince Metternich as examples) which had—without denying the importance of religion in national life—normally recognized the “essential distinction of political from religious action” and the limits of political influence. Socialism, on the other hand, tended to confuse religion and politics by appealing powerfully to the social conscience.¹⁸ If boundaries could be confused, they could also be constructive. They could help solidify group identity and at the same time act as porous “foyers” facilitating interaction with other groups: “The Church and the state are indeed representatives of two different orders which cannot be confused or identified. Yet on

¹⁴ Ibid., 29. Ellwood: “...Social science must find its completion in social religion. These two should become but different aspects of one fundamental attitude in all normal, educated minds.” Charles Ellwood, *The Reconstruction of Religion: A Sociological View* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), x-xi.

¹⁵ Dawson, “Sociology as a Science,” 28.

¹⁶ Christopher Dawson, “The Crisis of the West,” *Dublin Review* CLXXXI (1927): 274-275.

¹⁷ ———, *Religion and the Modern State* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935), 115.

¹⁸ “Conservatism,” a lecture written in June 1932, STA, box 3, folder 38, p. 5, 6.

the other hand they are not essentially contradictory or antagonistic, but are in principle complementary and capable of being harmonized with one another in their practical activity.”¹⁹

Dawson himself had grown up during the early 1890s on the political and cultural boundary between England and Wales, at Hay, which was nonetheless a porous boundary between two worlds—one of the Welsh farmers who came down to the town on market-days, the other of the English-speaking town itself. Hay also lay nestled between two geographical worlds: “I can remember I was conscious of the co-existence of two worlds—the rich Herefordshire countryside and the poor and wild Welsh hills of Radnor Forest to the North and the Black Mountain which rose immediately behind Hay to the South.” During these early years Dawson’s awareness of the differences between cultures formed.²⁰ An anthropologist wrote that, “it is where different cultures meet that people feel the distinctions of culture most acutely, since these are so often relevant to navigating their complex social landscape.” Today, in the twenty-first century, when many people think of the “pernicious colonialist, nationalist, and discriminatory purposes that the idea of boundaries has served,” they find support for jettisoning the whole value and idea of boundaries.²¹ For Dawson, however, attention to “bounded” cultures, to cultural *differences*—and the process of cultural change through military, technological, intellectual, or spiritual interaction *across* cultural boundaries—was a formative, personal experience for him as well as a central element of his mature historical thinking.

Intellectual Asceticism: Dawson wrote in his review of Berlin (above) that “the true historian... shares the same ideal [of the scientist] of a patient and impartial investigation of the phenomena that lie within his field of study.” Though Dawson worked from within a distinct value-system, his ideal of “patient and impartial investigation” was connected to the image of him (chapter one) as an “intellectual ascetic.” His asceticism and restraint could be seen in the way he wrote about *ideas*. As chapters two and three demonstrated, all ideas for Dawson had to be viewed against their institutional and broader cultural background. He attempted to prioritize the empirical labor necessary to gaining real historical understanding of context as the

¹⁹ “Comments on Middleton Murry’s Paper,” no date, E-JHOP, box 14, folder 4.

²⁰ Christopher Dawson, “Memories of a Victorian Childhood,” in *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, by Christina Scott (1984; New Brunswick: Transaction, 1992), 224.

²¹ Ira Bashkow, “A Neo-Boasian Conception of Cultural Boundaries,” *American Anthropologist* CVI (2004): 452-454. Emphasis in the original.

necessary precondition for understanding ideas. One sees that, in relation to the problems of his contemporary time that he wrote about, this ascetical state of mind required *diagnostics* before *therapy*,²² understanding before judgment.

His concern for sociological description and diagnostics was a leading characteristic throughout his life. For example, in his Minister's Institute speech of 29 January 1959 for the Harvard Divinity School entitled "What is a Christian Civilization?" he used potentially loaded words carefully. At the beginning of his talk, he said, he would use "Christian," "culture," and "civilization" descriptively, without implying value-judgments. He went on to describe culture as a moral order, a social way of life expressing itself through institutions, and a civilization as a sophisticated culture involving city life, as foundations for his talk.²³

Just so, intellectually speaking, Dawson's Catholicism was not typically the *end* of his thinking, the QED at the conclusion of his arguments, but more like the method of his thinking, a means or a way of seeing the past in all its catholic aspects. In other words, his immediate intellectual goal was not the promotion of Bellocian Catholic triumphalism or a specifically "Catholic politics." He did not look for arguments or highlight differences; he had an ecumenical mind. His friend David Jones remarked on this aspect of Dawson's mind in a letter after a dinner and conversation with Dawson in 1942: "O dear, it's nice to talk to someone whose brain is the right *kind*—that's what one sighs for—the disagreements don't matter—but the *temper*—the

²² Ernest Jones (1879-1958), the Welsh neurologist, psychoanalyst, and official biographer of Sigmund Freud, said in a 27 November 1938 symposium held by the Federation of Progressive Societies that, "The few good physicians that exist are able to restrain their need for salvation [healing the patient] through a quickly found solution and are preoccupied rather with the wish to establish more permanent forms of security by ascertaining the inner meaning of the disease and dangers in question. They are, in other words, diagnosticians rather than therapists. In mathematic language, they hold that certainty is a function of knowledge. Having the self-control with which they can stay their hand while they acquire this necessary knowledge, they are able to perceive that the factors concerned in social and international problems are far more complex and interrelated than is generally supposed." Ernest Jones, "How Can Civilization be Saved?," in *Essays in Applied Psycho-Analysis*, by Ernest Jones (New York: International Universities Press, 1964), I: 237. This diagnostic spirit was typical of Dawson, as when he reflected at the beginning of *Beyond Politics* (1939) on his earlier book *Religion and the Modern State* (1935) in which, "I pointed out that the issue was not merely a conflict between Democracy and Dictatorship or between Fascism and Communism. It was a change in the whole social structure of the modern world, which affects religion and culture as well as politics and economics. ...I think that events have justified this diagnosis of the situation and that few people to-day will question the existence of this totalitarian trend even in our own country." Christopher Dawson, *Beyond Politics* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1939), 3-4.

²³ Christopher Dawson, "What is a Christian Civilization?" Minister's Institute, Harvard Divinity School, 29 January 1959, recorded on a compact disc copy, HDA, bMS 613, box 9.

kind—the *sort* of thing that a chap regards as *significant*—that’s what one wants—and that is hard to come by.”²⁴

Even in his most polemical (but ecumenical) work during the Second World War, Dawson was not part of a “cause.” He primarily had a national and European cultural program in mind, not an ecclesiastical or political one. In his 1940 Editorial Note printed in the first two numbers of the Catholic journal *The Dublin Review*, Dawson wrote that “the need for organs of opinion which are not tied to a political party or confined to specialist studies is greater than ever before.”²⁵ During the last twenty years, he thought, the great obstacle to the preservation of the common values and traditions of Western culture “has been the division of thinkers and writers as well as politicians and economists into two opposite camps—“The Left” and “The Right,” which gives a partisan character to all intellectual activity and leaves no room for common action. Nevertheless, this division rests on a fundamental misconception of the situation which obscures the real issue.” He continued: “The revolutionary forces which inspire the two rival extremisms of the Left and the Right are both alike the enemies of Europe, and they have far more in common with each other than with either the conservative or democratic elements in Western society.... European civilization is then fighting a battle on two fronts against enemies that are co-operating for its destruction and if it is to survive it must base its resistance on its own spiritual resources and not on ideologies borrowed from its enemies.”²⁶

Because Dawson was concerned about political powers, including in Britain, using religion as a tool for psychological domination, one had to watch carefully, he thought, both sides of the political spectrum: “The worst of it is that the danger does not come from a single quarter. One has to watch the opposite poles of political opinion simultaneously, and overconcentration [sic] on the danger from one side may give the other its opportunity.”²⁷ Thus, his cultural program in *The Dublin Review* tried to act as a bridge not only between Right and Left but also between British, French, and German writers during the Second World War from a variety of affiliations and disciplines.²⁸

²⁴ Jones to Harman Grisewood, 1 June 1942, in René Hague, ed., *Dai Greatcoat: A Self-Portrait of David Jones in His Letters* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980), 119.

²⁵ Christopher Dawson, “Editorial Note,” *Dublin Review*, no. 415 (1940): 129.

²⁶ *Ibid.*: 130-131.

²⁷ Christopher Dawson, typed “Supplementary Comments,” E-JHOP, box 14, folder 4.

²⁸ Writers in the first two numbers edited by Dawson included: Hermann Rauschning (1887-1982), a German and early Nazi who later renounced the ideology and moved to the United States; Stanislas

Intellectual Bridges: If Dawson's program in his journal was to construct a bridge between diverse people and perspectives in pursuit of a common cause, such "bridging" was a typical feature of his historical thinking. The image of "bridge" possessed deep roots in his earliest literary memory. He recalled a poem his mother used to repeat. He never discovered the name of the author or the title of the poem, but it was about "Bran the Blessed, the mythical ancestor of the Holy Families of Wales—the story of the Lodestone river and the saying 'He who will be chief, let him be a bridge.'"²⁹ He often used the word "bridge" metaphorically to express the function of his historical concepts such as "religion" or "priest" or "culture." For example, his first series of Gifford Lectures commenced and concluded on the idea that the historic function of religion, its "task of conciliation," had been the "building of a bridge between the two worlds" of reason and science on the one hand and the psyche and religious experience on the other. He thought that only by cooperation of these two spheres had the world of culture come into existence. He sharpened the comparison with simile: religion is "like a bridge between two worlds by means of which the order of culture is brought into conscious relation with the transcendent reality of spiritual being."³⁰ Within those lectures, he also wrote that the priest-type was the "bridge builder and the guardian of the threshold between the world of men and the world of the gods."³¹

In a letter he used the bridge-metaphor to refer to "culture" as the link between the social sciences:

I find it very difficult to understand the principle of the delimitation between sociology and anthropology. The outside Readings in Sociology edited by Schuler etc. use texts by anthropologists like Ruth Benedict and M. Mead and Radcliffe-Brown as well as ones by sociologists and historians and philosophers. As I see it, the study of primitive societies is called anthropology, that of modern societies is sociology and that of the literate societies of

Fumet (1896-1983), a French Catholic writer and critic; Charles Williams (1886-1945), an Anglican poet, novelist, theologian, literary critic, and member of the Inklings; Paul Vignaux (1904-1987), a French historian of medieval philosophy; David Knowles (1896-1974), an English historian and Benedictine monk; George Bernanos (1888-1948), a French writer and critic of Vichy; Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), a French Catholic philosopher; A. D. Lindsay (1879-1952), a British academic and peer; Jacob Peter Mayer (1903-1992), a German sociologist and political writer who had fled to England; and Barbara Ward (1914-1981), a British economist.

²⁹ Dawson, "Memories of a Victorian Childhood," 225. This proverb came not from a poem but from the *Mabinogion*, a collection of prose stories collated from medieval manuscripts of Welsh mythology. Brân the Blessed appears in the second branch of this collection. He was a giant and a king of Britain. He laid himself down as a bridge across a river so that his army could cross over in an invasion of Ireland to rescue his abused sister. Lady Sharlotte Guest (1812-1895), an English businesswoman and translator, is best known for her pioneering English translation of the *Mabinogion*, which was likely the edition known by Dawson's mother.

³⁰ Christopher Dawson, *Religion and Culture* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1948), 22, 193.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

the past is called history: and yet all are really parts of the same subject. And I think the concept of culture provides the bridge between all three. Even a strictly sociological problem like that of class structure is inseparable from religious and ideological facts which are only covered by the wider study of culture as a whole (e.g. the case of the caste system in India).³²

Here one sees his idea of culture as a common object of knowledge and its metaphorical bridge-function as linking the social sciences and history for the sake of understanding that common object.

He also used the bridge-metaphor to cross over spiritual and chronological “gulfs,” as when he wrote that unless one understands the conviction of ancient cultures that “the powers that rule the earth and the powers that rule the year are governed or related by a common principle of order,” one “cannot hope to understand the unity of ancient culture or to bridge the spiritual gulf which separates us from the pagan world.”³³ Elsewhere he referred to the “makers of Europe” who “saved civilization from perishing in the storm of barbarian invasion and who built the bridge between the ancient and modern worlds.”³⁴ In his autobiographical reflections he did not use the word “bridge” in this chronological sense but he did refer to the “Titanic power” of the human mind which brought together past and present. Furthermore, the “power of religion,” expressed for him as a boy by the cathedral of Winchester, “held past and present together in a living whole.”³⁵

Significantly, at the beginning of his writing career (1920), Dawson used the idea of the “bridge” as a metaphor for the very function of the human being vis-à-vis reality itself. This anthropological meditation was a central plank of his “historical philosophy”³⁶ throughout his life: “[Man] is neither flesh nor spirit, but a compound of both. It is his function to be a bridge between two worlds, the world of sense and the world of spirit, each real, each good, but each essentially different.” He continued: “His nature is open on either side to impressions and is capable of a twofold activity, and his whole destiny depends on the proper co-ordination of the two elements in his

³² Dawson to John J. Mulloy, 1 July 1954, STA, box 10, folder 13 “Dawson to Mulloy Correspondence 1954-1958.” Dawson referred to Edgar Albert Schuler’s *Readings in Sociology* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1952), the American anthropologists Ruth Benedict (1887-1948) and Margaret Mead (1901-1978), and the English anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955).

³³ Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, 145.

³⁴ ———, “Editorial Note,” 129.

³⁵ ———, “Memories of a Victorian Childhood,” 225, 228.

³⁶ John Lukacs, *Historical Consciousness: The Remembered Past* (1968; New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, 1994), 267. An historical philosophy is not a philosophy of history but *historical thought*; it means “concentrating on the historicity of problems and of events, assuming the uniqueness of human nature anew, presenting no new definitions, no freshly jigsawed categories, emphasizing the existential—and not merely philosophical—primacy of truth....”

nature: and not his destiny alone; for since he is a bridge, the lower world is in some sense dependent on him for its spiritualisation and its integration in the universal order.” In order to avoid the monistic extremes of spiritualist religion on the one hand or materialism on the other, Dawson thought, the spiritualization of the whole of man’s nature was necessary, “which will unite the life of the body and the life of the spirit in the service of a common end.”³⁷ *A common end*: in other words, the road over this bridge *went somewhere*, orientated toward a common goal or object of knowledge which could act as mediator between separate elements.

Questions and Answers: *Questions*, arising in the problematic present, could also be important chronological bridges to the past. Dawson wrote in 1933 that, “All genuine thought is rooted in personal needs”³⁸—by which he meant that for him, the present informed his thinking by which he approached the past. Questions arose for him in the present, and he turned his gaze toward the past in order to both understand it for its own sake and to interpret the present in terms of the past.

This Ph.D. thesis has elaborated on some of Dawson’s questions, especially as influenced by the Great War and the interwar years: what is the relationship between sociology and social readjustment? What is human progress? What new community can meaningfully structure historical study after the calamitous crash of nations in 1914? How can the vital contact between the spiritual life of the individual and the social and economic organization of modern culture be recovered? What historical and psychological conditions influenced the rise of totalitarian ideologies? What political, intellectual, and spiritual posture can one take in the face of such ideologies? Dawson was not alone in asking these questions. And they were not always explicit in his writings. But they significantly shaped his historiographical attention on many themes: religion, culture, cultural morphology, secularization, revolutions, and the ancient, medieval, and modern historical periods.

Too often, writing on Dawson has tended to summarize his *answers*, his final positions on the function of religion or his interpretation of the significance of the Reformation, for example. This thesis has attempted to demonstrate a more fruitful approach by asking: what were Dawson’s questions? One can easily discover his answers by simply reading his books—he is a far better writer than most

³⁷ Christopher Dawson, “The Nature and Destiny of Man,” in *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (by Christopher Dawson; London: Sheed & Ward, 1933), 311, 326-327.

³⁸ ———, *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1933), v.

commentators anyway. However, through reconstruction of his questions Dawson has been linked to his various contexts. This effort, in turn, has recovered something of the methods of thought, the elements of his logic or cultural mind, by which he dialogued with those contexts in his historical study of culture. His history became a conversation between the past and the questions of his present, which is also what this thesis has attempted to be.

In order for Dawson's writings to continue to survive in the twenty-first century, in order for the writings of any past thinker to remain durably and accurately in the present, they must maintain vital contact with the questions whence they arose—hence the purpose of this thesis. Otherwise the texts and their answers become abstract as the concerns of their era recede into the past. And abstraction fuels ideological thinking. Perhaps, then, a critical function of the intellectual historian is maintenance of the vital highway between questions present and questions past. This function, to be genuine, must spring from real interest in understanding something of the *truths of human life* in the past in all its aspects. Encounters with these truths of what it meant to be human remain valid across time. Pursued in this way, the fruits of intellectual history are potentially great for the enrichment of intellectual life in the present.

Appendix A: Contextual Chronology of Christopher Dawson's Life between the World Wars

Year:	Places and Events in Dawson's Life	Historical Context
1888	-	Germany: Kaiser Wilhelm II comes to power; he is forced to abdicate in 1918.
1889	Hay-on-Wye, Herfordshire: Christopher Dawson born to Henry Philip Dawson and Mary Louisa (<i>née</i> Bevan).	<p>France: Eiffel Tower completed in wrought iron; historian Fustel de Coulanges dies.</p> <p>Ruhr, Germany: Miner strikes. London: Dock strikes.</p> <p>USA: Thomas Edison makes first moving picture; Alvord Lake Bridge (San Francisco) is the first reinforced concrete bridge built in the country.</p> <p>Austria: Adolf Hitler; Ludwig Wittgenstein born</p> <p>Britain: Charlie Chaplin; Arnold Toynbee; Eileen Power; R. G. Collingwood born.</p>
1890	-	Scotland: Firth of Forth Bridge completed in steel.
1891	-	Vatican: <i>Rerum Novarum</i> (Pope Leo XIII).
1896	Burnsall, Yorkshire: Dawson family moves to Hartlington Hall.	Greece: First modern Olympic Games.
1899	Bilton Grange, near Rugby: Dawson attends preparatory school.	South Africa: Boer War begins.
1901	-	Britain: Queen Victoria dies.
1902	-	USA: <i>Varieties of Religious Experience</i> (William James)

		Britain: <i>Imperialism: A Study</i> (J. A. Hobson).
1903-1904	Winchester: Dawson attends school; spends the autumn at Montreux in Switzerland to recover health.	-
1905	Bletsoe, Bedfordshire: Dawson attends private tutor.	France: Separation of church and state. Switzerland: Einstein introduces theory of relativity.
1906-1907	Oxford and Germany: Dawson attends private tutors.	Modernist controversy within Catholicism.
1907	-	Paris: <i>The Young Ladies of Avignon</i> (oil painting by Pablo Picasso).
1908	European travels with his father; Oxford: Dawson studies history at Trinity College under Ernest Barker.	Britain: <i>The Mystical Element in Religion</i> (Friedrich von Hügel).
1909	Rome: Dawson travels with his friend Edward Watkin and is inspired on the steps of the Capitol to write a history of culture; Oxford: Dawson meets his future wife Valery Mills.	Britain: <i>Garibaldi and the Thousand</i> (G. M. Trevelyan).
1911	Sweden: Dawson studies under the economist Gustav Cassel.	Britain: <i>Liberalism</i> (L. T. Hobhouse).
1912	London: Dawson works for Arthur Steel-Maitland (Conservative MP for Birmingham East); Oxford: Dawson studies agricultural economics.	USA: Woodrow Wilson elected President. France: <i>The Elementary Forms of Religious Life</i> (Émile Durkheim).
1913	-	Paris: <i>The Rite of Spring</i> (ballet with music by Russian composer Igor Stravinsky).
1914	Oxford: Dawson is received into the Catholic Church at St. Aloysius on 5 January; Florence: Dawson stays with his fiancé and her mother	World War I begins.

	studying Italian history and art through the spring—his last trip abroad for many years; Dawson is intensely patriotic but rejected for military service due to poor health.	
1915-1916	Oxford: Dawson teaches at a Franciscan school, which was classed as war-work.	Trench warfare enters the Western imagination.
1916	Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire: Dawson and Valery Mills marry; the family eventually includes one son and two daughters.	Battles of Verdun and Somme.
1917	-	Germany: <i>The Idea of the Holy</i> (Rudolf Otto). Russian Revolution.
1918	London: Dawson works for the Admiralty Intelligence Department in a section dealing with history and ethnology; Valery volunteers for the Catholic Women's League, sending packages to the front and writing letters to bereaved relations of soldiers killed in action.	Britain: Women over the age of thirty gain right to vote. Germany: <i>Decline of the West</i> , vol. 1 (Oswald Spengler).
1919	Tisbury, Wiltshire: the Dawsons live in a cottage without electricity or running water; Christopher works as independent scholar and starts to write.	Paris: Treaty of Versailles USA: Women gain the right to vote. Britain: "The events of the coming year will not be shaped by the deliberate acts of statesmen, but by the hidden currents, flowing continually beneath the surface of political history, of which no one can predict the outcome."—J. M. Keynes
1920	"The Nature and Destiny of Man"; "The Passing of Industrialism"—Dawson's first serious publications.	Britain: <i>The Idea of Progress</i> (J. B. Bury); <i>Outline of History</i> (H. G. Wells). World: Flu pandemic ends—killed tens of millions. Germany: Hitler joins Nazi party. Russia: first country to

		legalize abortion.
1921	-	<p>Italy: Fascist Party founded by Mussolini.</p> <p>Russia: Civil War ends; Lenin proposes New Economic Policy.</p> <p>USA: American Birth Control League founded by Margaret Sanger.</p>
1922	"Cycles of Civilizations"	<p>Britain: "The Wasteland" (T. S. Eliot); British Broadcasting Company founded; <i>The Golden Bough</i> (James Frazer, single-volume edition).</p> <p>Irish Free State comes into existence.</p> <p>Egypt: Tutankhamun's tomb discovered.</p> <p>USA: Maidenform bras introduced in reaction to the Flapper boyish look.</p>
1923	-	Imperial Conference recognizes that the Dominions of the British Empire can determine their own foreign policy.
1925	Dawlish, Devonshire: Dawson works as assistant lecturer in the history of culture at University College of the South West (later Exeter University).	<p>Britain: <i>Science and the Modern World</i> (A. N. Whitehead).</p> <p>Germany: <i>Mein Kampf</i> (Adolf Hitler).</p> <p>Paris: International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts inaugurates Art Deco style.</p>
1927	-	Denmark: Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle.
1928	<i>The Age of the Gods</i>	USA: First Mickey Mouse

		<p>cartoon released; Amelia Earhart becomes first woman to fly across the Atlantic Ocean.</p> <p>Germany: <i>All Quiet on the Western Front</i> (Erich Remarque).</p>
1929	<i>Progress and Religion</i>	<p>USA: Stock market crashes.</p> <p>Britain: Second Labour government forms under Ramsay MacDonald.</p>
1930	-	Netherlands: John Smulders (a Catholic physician) creates the rhythm method for avoiding pregnancy.
1931	<i>Christianity and the New Age</i>	<p>Britain: <i>The Whig Interpretation of History</i> (Herbert Butterfield); National Government forms.</p> <p>USA: Empire State Building completed.</p>
1932	Rome: Dawson attends a meeting organized by the Royal Academy of Italy on "Europe"; he publishes <i>The Making of Europe</i> , and <i>The Modern Dilemma</i> .	<p>USA: Franklin D. Roosevelt elected President.</p> <p>Britain: <i>Brave New World</i> (Aldous Huxley).</p>
1933	Burnsall, Yorkshire: Dawson's father dies and he inherits the family estate (Hartlington Hall) and money; he moves to the beautiful north country (until 1936) which he loves, but he worries about intellectual isolation and the difficult winters. He publishes <i>The Spirit of the Oxford Movement</i> , <i>Enquiries into Religion and Culture</i> , and an essay "William Langland: The Vision of Piers Plowman."	<p>USA: "The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself" (Franklin D. Roosevelt).</p> <p>Germany: Hitler appointed Chancellor.</p> <p>Britain: The Oxford Union approves a resolution stating, "That this House will in no circumstances fight for its King and country."</p>
1934	<i>Mediaeval Religion</i> ; Dawson lectures before the British Academy on Edward Gibbon; he turns to focus on contemporary political ideologies in his	USA: <i>It Happened One Night</i> (film by Frank Capra).

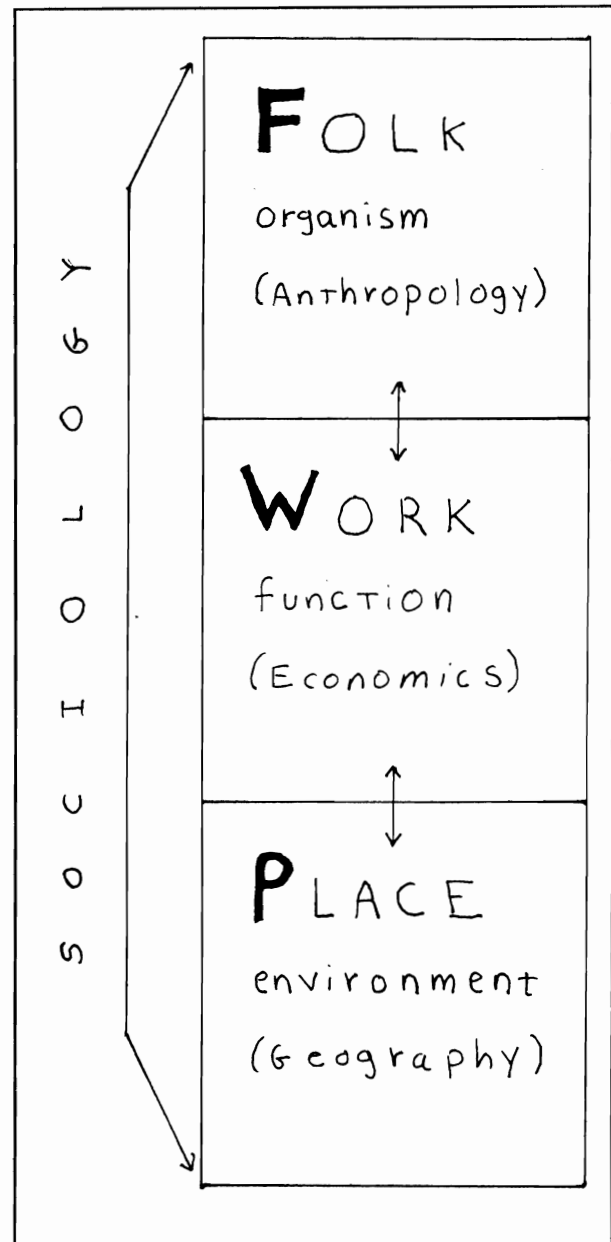
	writing.	
1935	<i>Religion and the Modern State</i>	<p>Abyssinia Crisis.</p> <p>Britain: Penguin Books founded.</p> <p>USA: Swing music popularizes.</p>
1936	Dawson suffers severe mental depression and physical ailment, making him unable to write much until 1939. He and Valery move to Sidmouth, Devonshire, for several months before residing in Italy for six months.	<p>Spanish Civil War begins.</p> <p>USA: Hoover Dam completed (world's largest concrete structure at the time).</p>
1937	England: unsettled as always, the Dawsons move from rented house to rented house 1937-1938.	<p>Second Sino-Japanese War begins.</p> <p>Britain: <i>The Road to Wigan Pier</i> (George Orwell); Neville Chamberlain becomes Prime Minister.</p> <p>Vatican: <i>Mit brennender Sorge</i> (Pope Pius XI).</p> <p>USA: Golden Gate Bridge opens.</p> <p>Paris: <i>Guernica</i> (Pablo Picasso).</p>
1938	-	<p>Munich Crisis.</p> <p>Austria: <i>Anschluss</i>.</p> <p>USA: First commercial use of nylon.</p>
1939	<i>Beyond Politics</i> ; the Dawsons rent a house in Cambridge and let out Hartlington Hall to the Leeds Grammar School for an indefinite amount of time.	<p>Spain: Francisco Franco assumes power</p> <p>New York: World's Fair theme is: "Dawn of a New Day."</p> <p>Germany invades Poland.</p>

		World War II begins
1940	Dawson invited to edit <i>The Dublin Review</i> and help lead the Sword of the Spirit movement by Cardinal Arthur Hinsley.	Germany invades France. Britain: "I have nothing to offer you but blood, toil, tears, and sweat" (Winston Churchill).
1941	Oxford: The Dawsons settle at Boars Hill until 1953.	USA: Japan attacks Pearl Harbor; General Mills introduces the breakfast cereal Cheerios.
1942	<i>Judgment of the Nations</i>	Britain: Publication of the first Beveridge Report.
1943	-	USA: Pentagon completed.
1944	-	D-Day
1945	-	Japan: Atoms bombs dropped. WWII ends. Britain: <i>Animal Farm</i> (George Orwell).
1947-1949	Dawson delivers his Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh.	-
1948	<i>Religion and Culture</i> ; he contributes to a BBC series on the ideas and beliefs of the Victorians in company with G. M. Trevelyan, Bertrand Russell, and Lord David Cecil.	-
1950	<i>Religion and the Rise of Western Culture</i>	Korean War begins.
1951-1952	Spain: Dawson is invited to spend the winter lecturing in Madrid and Cadiz.	-
1953	Budleigh Salterton, Devon: The Dawsons move to a smaller house; Christopher enjoys walks along the beach or the River Otter every afternoon.	Russia: Stalin dies. USA: <i>Playboy</i> magazine established.
1954	<i>Medieval Essays</i>	-

1956	<i>Dynamics of World History</i>	-
1957	-	Sputnik.
1958	Cambridge, Massachusetts: Dawson takes the chair of Roman Catholic Studies at Harvard University until 1962.	-
1959	<i>The Movement of World Revolution</i>	-
1960	<i>The Historic Reality of Christian Culture</i>	-
1961	<i>The Crisis of Western Education</i>	Germany: Berlin Wall built.
1962	Return to Budleigh Salterton, Devon: Dawson lives his last years here.	-
1965	<i>The Dividing of Christendom</i>	Vietnam: US troops deployed.
1967	<i>The Formation of Christendom</i>	Britain: Abortion Act.
1968	-	France: Student protests; general strikes. USA: Civil Rights Act.
1970	Dawson dies and is buried in the Anglican churchyard at Burnsall, Yorkshire, next to his parents. Valery dies in 1974.	-
1972	<i>The Gods of Revolution</i>	-
1975	<i>Religion and World History</i>	-

Appendix B: The Geddes-Le Play Formula

The Sociological Society initiated a conference on the correlation of the social sciences at Oxford that occurred in October 1922. The Society hoped that after the confusion of the Great War and postwar years, the conference would attract young people not previously exposed to sociology. Dawson's friend, Alexander Farquharson, summarized the papers delivered at the conference in the 1924 volume of *The Sociological Review*. These papers sought to link the various disciplines to sociology, which included biology (by Julian Huxley), anthropology (by R. R. Marett), history (by F. S. Marvin), economics (by W. J. Roberts), and others.¹ Patrick Geddes contributed a paper called "A Proposed Co-Ordination of the Social Sciences." Unfortunately, it arrived from India, where Geddes was working, too late, and so was not read at the conference. However, it was published subsequently in 1924 in *The Sociological Review*.² This article is the source of the diagram below, by which Geddes tried to express a sociological synthesis of life. That synthesis viewed human life as made up of three general categories: Folk, Work, and Place. These elements could affect each other, as indicated



by the arrows. The "Geddes-Le Play formula," as Dawson called it,³ was an important foundation of his concept of culture as a common way of life in relation to an environment. He expanded on this "web of sociology," as Geddes called it, by bringing in ideas and beliefs (see Appendix C).

¹ Alexander Farquharson, "The Oxford Conference on the Correlation of the Social Sciences: An Appreciation of the Discussions, with abstracts of the papers read," *Sociological Review* XV (1923): 48.

² Patrick Geddes, "A Proposed Co-Ordination of the Social Sciences," *Sociological Review* XVI (1924).

³ Christopher Dawson, "Prevision in Religion," in *Dynamics of World History*, ed. John J. Mulloy (1956; Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002), 98.

Appendix C: Culture as an Object of Knowledge

Influenced by Patrick Geddes and the Sociological Society, Dawson adopted the Geddes-Le Play formula (see Appendix B) into his sociology but added a fourth element: *intellect*. Dawson did not create the diagram below, but it is implied in his work. I am grateful for the inspiration of James Gaston at the Franciscan University of Steubenville who uses pictorial interpretations of Dawson's concept of culture similar to this one in his classes. All four major structures of cultural life, I/FWP, could influence each other. A line separates the intellectual element from the biological elements to indicate the importance of the former in Dawson's view of human culture. He used these structures of cultural life (I/FWP) as intellectual reference-points by which to study cultures of the past and the present. They allowed him to maintain a unified vision of culture and knowledge of culture while also recognizing the limitations and distinctions constitutive of the disciplines.

		Elements of Cultural Life	Representative Disciplines
CULTURE as a common way of life	I intellect	Ideas/Religious belief self-understanding cultural identity	Theology philosophy political theory intellectual history
	F folk	Social/Political state, nation, church, folk music, dance, architecture, literature	Sociology/anthropology social history art history literary studies
	W work	Economic industry, trade, fishing, technology, agriculture, etc.	economics economic history
	P place	Environment rivers, soil, climate, region cityscape, etc.	human ecology geography geology environmental history

culture as an object of knowledge

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